

EXPLORING BSW EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCES OF WORKING
WITH UNDER-PREPARED STUDENTS

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Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy
in the School of Social Work,
Indiana University

June, 2015

Accepted by the Graduate Faculty, Indiana University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In my first semester of course work in my Ph.D. program at Indiana University School of Social Work, I expressed some anxiety about pursuing a Ph.D. to one of my mentors, Carol Hostetter. She told me that I would be fine if I just “showed up” each day. As simple as her words sounded to me at the time, I found them to hold true, and I thank her for them. Once I found a comfortable chair and began to read, or sat in front of my laptop and began to type, I was fine. However, getting myself to show up—to sit down and work—was often difficult for me, and I would not have done it had it not been for so many friends, family members, colleagues, and mentors who encouraged me along the way. I owe a debt of gratitude to each of you who supported me in reaching this milestone.

First, I offer my love and gratitude to my partner, Scott Burns Kahler, for his companionship, fortitude, and support throughout this journey. From my application to the Ph.D. program to my writing the concluding paragraph of my dissertation, he consistently communicated his belief in me and my success. He empathetically listened to my musings and my frustrations and he diligently read and re-read my writing—acts that contributed to his own ability to speak at length and in depth on my research topic. He graciously picked up my slack around the house when I was immersed in school, good deeds for which the cats and dog are also grateful. Scott helped to calm me during the anxious moments, he kept me grounded in the experiences of life that are most important to me, and perhaps most importantly, he made me laugh when I really needed it. I would not have made it without you!

I am thankful to my parents, Robert and Shirley Richardson, for their unrelenting support of me and my educational goals. They made many sacrifices for me to attend college, and then for me to pursue my master and doctoral degrees. I cannot adequately express my appreciation for their sacrifices and their support.

I could not have made it through course work without the comradery offered to me by Dr. Amy Murphy-Nugen, Valerie Decker, and Dr. Janell Horton. You made the difficult times bearable, and you filled the good times with laughter. In addition to offering her friendship, Dr. Janell Horton took extra time to read my work and provide constructive feedback. She also provided additional support and guidance while I was finishing my dissertation. I offer her my gratitude.

I am grateful to Dr. Jim Luther, president of Luther Consulting and my boss, for his encouragement while I completed my degree. As he had also completed a Ph.D., I appreciate his empathy and his support during the process. He also offered me flexibility in my work schedule to accommodate my educational endeavors. I could not have completed my degree without his support. In addition to Jim's support, my co-workers at Luther Consulting consistently asked me about my research and reassured me that I would make it to the end. I am grateful for their encouragement and for the opportunity to work with such bright and thoughtful colleagues.

Throughout the doctoral program, the members of my dissertation committee have mentored me and directly contributed to my success as a student and as a fledgling researcher. I want to recognize and thank Dr. Kathy Lay, Dr. Lisa McGuire, Dr. Henry Merrill, Dr. Bob Vernon, and Dr. Margaret Adamek for their time and their wisdom throughout the journey. You challenged me while nurturing me along the way—thank

you. Finally, I want to especially thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Kathy Lay, for her patience while shepherding me through the process, for reading and re-reading my work, and for taking the time to talk me down off of the ledge on more than one occasion. I appreciate your investment in me.

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Little is known about the perspectives of social work educators who work with under-prepared students in baccalaureate social work (BSW) programs. Educators across fields believe that students are increasingly under-prepared to be successful in higher education, and social work programs face greater numbers of under-prepared students seeking BSW degrees. Although an increasing amount of research offers strategies for matriculating, retaining, and teaching under-prepared students, these strategies are often presented without the day-to-day contextual experiences faced by the educators who work with under-prepared students. To begin to fill this gap, the researcher interviewed 11 participants and used Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to uncover the essential experiential elements of working with under-prepared BSW students and to reveal the meaning that social work educators create within these experiences. Analysis resulted in four overlapping themes including understanding under-preparation as social injustice, questioning what it means to be a social work educator, recalling compelling moments, and demonstrating care in and out of the classroom. These results suggest that social work programs and educators can more explicitly recognize and discuss how working with under-prepared students mirrors traditional social work practice. Based on these results, the meaning of advancing social justice for under-prepared students, the conflicting roles that educators often adopt with under-prepared students, and the influence of external forces on educators' work all deserve further research.

Kathy Lay, Ph.D., Chair

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Chapter I: Introduction..... | 1 |
| Under-prepared Students..... | 2 |
| Undergraduate Social Work Education..... | 5 |
| Chapter II: Literature Review | 12 |
| Socio-Cultural Capital Theory | 12 |
| Practices | 16 |
| Policy..... | 31 |
| Unanswered Questions | 39 |
| Research Purpose, Questions, and Implications..... | 42 |
| Chapter III: Research Methods | 45 |
| Research Design and Rationale..... | 45 |
| Reflexivity and Situating the Researcher | 46 |
| Participant Selection..... | 47 |
| Data Collection: Hermeneutic Questioning | 50 |
| Data Analysis: Hermeneutic Circle..... | 53 |
| Rigor: Establishing Trustworthiness | 59 |
| Ethical Considerations..... | 61 |
| Chapter IV: Results..... | 65 |
| Reflexivity..... | 67 |
| Understanding Under-Preparation as Social Injustice | 71 |
| Theme summary. | 82 |
| Questioning What It Means To Be a Social Work Educator | 82 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Role dimension.. | 83 |
| Responsibility dimension | 94 |
| Collegial dimension..... | 108 |
| Theme summary | 117 |
| Recalling Compelling Moments..... | 118 |
| Empathic experiences | 119 |
| Validating experiences | 126 |
| Theme summary | 132 |
| Demonstrating Care In and Out of the Classroom | 134 |
| Personal relationships. | 135 |
| Time outside of the classroom. | 140 |
| Negotiating individual circumstances. | 141 |
| Theme summary | 144 |
| Chapter Summary..... | 145 |
| Chapter V: Discussion, Limitations, and Implications | 146 |
| Discussion | 146 |
| Understanding under-preparation as social injustice..... | 147 |
| Questioning what it means to be a social work educator | 149 |
| Role dimension | 151 |
| Responsibility dimension..... | 151 |
| Collegial dimension.. | 152 |
| Recalling compelling moments | 153 |
| Demonstrating Care In and Out of the Classroom | 155 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Limitations | 157 |
| Change in participant eligibility. | 157 |
| Disproportionate sample size for time in analysis..... | 158 |
| Implications | 159 |
| Implications for social work education | 159 |
| Implications for future research..... | 162 |
| Chapter Summary..... | 164 |
| Appendix A: Research Announcement..... | 167 |
| Appendix B: Interview Prompts | 169 |
| Appendix C: Confidentiality Agreement for Transcription Services | 171 |
| Appendix D: Indiana University Study Information Sheet..... | 172 |
| Appendix E: Visual Representation of Thematic Structure..... | 174 |
| Appendix F: Evolving Analysis Codes and Thematic Structures..... | 175 |
| References..... | 177 |
| Curriculum Vitae | |

Chapter I: Introduction

In the larger context of higher education, Astin (1999) claimed that the education of under-prepared students “is the most important educational problem in America today” (p. 10). Now, more than a decade after Astin made his claim, observations of undergraduate students suggest that under-preparation is escalating (Jackson & Kurlaender, 2014). Educators recognize that a growing number of under-prepared students are seeking the advantages of post-secondary degrees. Nearly 84% of college faculty believe that students are unprepared for academic success (Sanoff, 2006). More than 80% of university-level educators believe that students are not well prepared or only somewhat well prepared for writing, reading and comprehending complex ideas, verbally communicating about ideas, studying, and identifying and using academic supports. Seventy-nine percent of educators believe that these students are unmotivated or only somewhat motivated to work hard. One educator stated, “We spend too much time teaching students basic skills that I learned before the eighth grade” (Sanoff, 2006, p. B5). The following research seeks to better understand the context of the preceding observations in social work education by uncovering the day-to-day experiences of social work educators working with under-prepared students.

Gabriel (2008) states that, “As educators, we have an obligation to all our students, including those who arrive unprepared” (p. 4), but what does this obligation mean for social work education and its responsibility to prepare competent practitioners who work with vulnerable populations? As professionals, social workers take and promote action with and for marginalized populations to promote social and economic justice, a commitment which creates a client-practitioner relationship (National

Association of Social Workers, 2007). This ethics-bound relationship between practitioner and client is complex when the practitioner is an educator and the “client” is a student. Defining the student-faculty relationship this way is rejected by some (see Cole, 1991). Maidment and Briggs (1998) state that, “Applicants for social work courses cannot, and indeed must not, be treated as one would treat a social work client” (p. 67). Faced with protecting the integrity of the profession and the well-being of future consumers, these protests against student-as-client are appropriate and necessary; however, the ways in which student-educator relationships *parallel* client-clinician relationships serves as a lens for this research to critically analyze and enhance the practice of social work education. How do educators respond to the past and current vulnerabilities of under-prepared students while preparing them as future practitioners for work with vulnerable populations? Can today’s vulnerable student be tomorrow’s professional social worker? How do social work educators navigate the day-to-day complexities that they experience as they work with vulnerable students who are striving to be future colleagues?

Under-prepared Students

This research defines an “under-prepared student” as any student whose academic performance does not meet the minimum expectations for college success and whose under-preparation may be linked to one or more experiences reflecting social or economic marginalization. Academic performance includes what Dzubak (2006) calls “college readiness skills,” or “the use of strategies that lead to effective study, problem solving, and thinking critically, in order to progress satisfactorily through college level course work” (p. 2). Under-preparation often takes the form of poor writing abilities,

difficulty comprehending complex information, inadequate math and science skills, and poor self-directed learning. These students are often perceived as lacking motivation to improve.

Additionally, under-preparation is consistently linked with learners who, in part, live with the negative consequences of historical educational inequities (Gabriel, 2008; Green, 2006; Levin, 2007; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). Researchers tend to define these experiences in narrow terms, or by what Orbe (2008) calls “identity markers,” such as learners with low-incomes, students who are the first in their families to attend post-secondary education (first-generation students), students who are a racial or ethnic minority, or students who attend community colleges (Green, 2006; Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007; Richardson & Hudson, 2008). In contrast, Levin (2007) used a more comprehensive definition and suggested that the most challenged learners possess more than one identifying experience, or a set of disadvantaging experiences which “can be tied to economic status, [and] also includes social, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds and conditions, as well as mental and physical functioning” (p. 10). Levin’s idea that under-prepared students possess a set of disadvantages better reflects the complexity of under-preparation and its social and historical development.

Regardless of any unique set of disadvantages or individual identity markers, researchers observe common experiences among under-prepared students. Pascarella, et al. (2004) found that these students “tend to be at a distinct disadvantage with respect to basic knowledge about postsecondary education (e.g., costs and application process), level of family income and support, educational degree expectations and plans, and academic preparation in high school” (p. 250). College graduation rates of African

American, Latino, Native American, and low-income students fall well below the overall graduation rate (Green, 2006; Jackson & Kurlaender, 2014; Saenz & Barrera, 2007). Students who represent racial minorities or low-income families do not take as many college preparatory courses in high school and their math and reading skills are often below average. Additionally, under-prepared students achieve lower grade point averages (GPA) and score lower on academic and entrance examinations (Berger, 1992; Green, 2006; Levin, 2007). Low performance and low retention hinder under-prepared students from obtaining the economic and social benefits associated with higher education (Collins & Mowbray, 2005; Gabriel, 2008; Green, 2006). Without a bachelor's degree, high-school graduates earned a median full-time income of \$21,100 less than their same-age peers in 2012, a deficit that increases over time (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013). Under-preparation for secondary education and failing to complete a bachelor's degree can perpetuate the social and economic marginalization of these students.

Justice for under-prepared students in higher education can be conceptualized as promoting “the institutional conditions necessary for the development and exercise of individual capacities and collective communication and cooperation” as a means for equalizing advantage (Young, 1990, p. 39). Undergraduate education helps equalize advantage for under-prepared students by teaching them how to compensate for historical inequities—prior conditions that systemically disadvantaged these students (Levin, 2007). Astin (1999) calls this the “civic view” of education—attending to the development of personal qualities that are critical to communal functioning and a democratic society. Although Levin and Astin speak to education in general, a civic view directly applies to social work education, especially baccalaureate social work (BSW)

education. BSW programs can promote social justice for marginalized students by helping them develop their capacity for democratic participation in society.

Undergraduate Social Work Education

BSW education differs from other social work degrees in that it serves two purposes. Whereas master's degrees in social work focus on advanced professional practice skills, BSW education entails a second, broader goal related to student development, what Elias and Merriam (2005) might call "practical wisdom" (p. 28).

According to Elias and Merriam (2005):

Practical wisdom refers to the ability to apply information and knowledge to the activities of daily life. It is this wisdom that makes a person a good parent, citizen, and worker. Practical wisdom is characterized by choosing the moderate position between two extremes. The wisdom cannot be directly taught for it demands direct experience. (p. 28)

Like any baccalaureate degree rooted in the liberal arts, a BSW education builds the capacity of learners to dialogue with peers and apply knowledge in everyday situations through the overall experience of being a student—practical wisdom. Chickering and Gamson (1987) state that, regardless of field of study, "undergraduate education should prepare students to understand and intelligently deal with modern life" (p. 3). Lindeman (1926/1989), a social worker and education scholar, believed education should enhance learners' ability "to be intelligent about the things that happen to us" (p. 4). Practical wisdom is also akin to Dzubak's (2006) college readiness skills—critical thinking, problem-solving, negotiating new experiences—but applies more broadly to both personal and professional contexts. Building practical wisdom and preparing technically proficient professionals represent the dual purposes of BSW education.

Information on the contributions or challenges of under-prepared students in social work programs is limited or dated. However, similar trends to those generally perceived in education have been observed within social work and social science programs (Gabriel, 2008; Holmstrom & Taylor, 2008a; Ishiyama, 2002, 2007; Negroni-Rodriguez, Dicks, & Morales, 2006). The balance of this section briefly explores these issues, along with social work education's role in responding to these issues.

Interest in BSW degrees is on the rise among under-prepared students (Valentine, 2004). Valentine (2004) suggests that social work receives more applicants with questionable preparation than other fields. A portion of these students come from community colleges, often through articulation agreements—a written description of a transfer process from a two-year human services program to a four-year BSW program (Council on Social Work Education, 2008a). A growing number of agreements between two-year human services programs and four-year BSW programs ease the process by which students matriculate (Berg-Weger, Birkenmaier, Tebb, & Rosenthal, 1999). Results of a 2008 Council on Social Work Education (2008a) survey of BSW programs indicated that 56.8% (n=159) of responding programs currently had an articulation agreement in place with a local human services program. An additional 13% (n=38) were currently considering an articulation agreement. These agreements, in part, strengthen the representation of diverse experiences among social work students and, eventually, practitioners (Holmstrom & Taylor, 2008a; Negroni-Rodriguez et al., 2006). On the plus side, an increasing number of community college transfer students in BSW programs may expand diversity among social workers.

Although the status of having attended a community college is often used as a proxy for under-preparation (Green, 2006; Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007; Richardson & Hudson, 2008), community college students may demonstrate motivation and fortitude in completing a BSW program. Berg-Weger et al. (1999) suggest that students transferring from a community college into a four-year BSW program may possess more focused educational goals following two years of human services coursework. Internships often required of human services graduates also provide transfer students with practical experience applicable to social work training, experience that may exceed that of some of their more traditional-student peers. The life experiences of these and other under-prepared students may also allow for enhanced empathy with social work consumers (Zosky, Unger, White, & Mills, 2003), a competency students are required to demonstrate as part of their interpersonal skill set (Council on Social Work Education, 2008b, EP 2.1.10(a)). Life experience and more focused educational goals represent strengths that under-prepared students may bring to social work programs.

Integration of under-prepared students in BSW programs also presents challenges. Under-prepared students are less likely to have the same level of practical wisdom—the capacity of learners to dialogue with peers and apply knowledge in everyday situations—as their more traditional peers and faculty (Emirbayer & Williams, 2005). As these students transition into higher education, they often struggle with the new roles, responsibilities, and expectations that confront them at four-year institutions (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Ishitani, 2006; Pascarella et al., 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007). For example, students may not know how to create notes from classroom discussions or how to study for exams, they might not understand the time

commitment needed to read and digest course material, or they might not know how to use a syllabus to determine assignment requirements and due dates (Gabriel, 2008). As mentioned earlier, these experiences can result in poorer classroom performance and higher dropout rates.

A specific concern among professional degree-granting programs is the suitability of under-prepared students for practice (Cole, 1991; Dillon, 2007; Holmstrom & Taylor, 2008b; Tam & Coleman, 2009). Lower levels of practical wisdom can significantly hinder students' abilities to demonstrate competence in professional practices (Emirbayer & Williams, 2005). Social work students must demonstrate the ability to navigate social contexts, think critically, and synthesize information in order to matriculate, graduate, and effectively work with consumers. As the label suggests, the pre-college contexts of under-prepared students have not sufficiently prepared them to hone professional practices at a pace typically expected of undergraduates—an experience for which they are often blamed (Comerford, 2005). Regardless of who or what is responsible for under-preparation, social work programs are rightly concerned about students who do not demonstrate minimum expectations for competency—professional suitability—within programmatic timeframes. Social work educators are held responsible for protecting the safety of consumers and the credibility of the profession from incompetent or unethical practice; however, measuring students' suitability for practice often lacks precision and clarity (Dillon, 2007; Holmstrom & Taylor, 2008a, 2008b; Tam & Coleman, 2009), an especially salient issue when discussing under-prepared students in social work education.

As under-prepared students in BSW programs continue to pursue the advantages of higher education and preparation for professional practice, educators raise questions regarding social work education's role in advantaging or disadvantaging these students (Dillon, 2007). Traditionally, social work education is considered the process by which students learn to intervene with clients—individuals, groups, and communities—to promote social and economic justice (Council on Social Work Education, 2008b). While social work education prepares students with competencies for professional practice, might it also model these approaches by viewing *education as a social work intervention* that promotes social and economic justice for under-prepared students?

Social work education asked similar questions in the past and responded, in part, with the launch of the Minority Fellowship Program (MFP) in 1974 (Pinto & Francis, 2005). MFP offered student fellows financial support while they pursued doctoral degrees in social work. The program was also a mechanism for developing a social network among peers, creating both informational and emotional resources necessary for successful completion of degrees. Pinto and Francis (2005) suggest that developing such a strategy to support minority students within social work education stems from the profession's mission to advance social justice for all people, especially historically marginalized populations. Although the MFP reflects students pursuing doctoral education, the concepts upon which it was built are applicable to students at all levels. Social work educators can create mechanisms that promote social justice within social work education.

Social work is not immune to the cultural influences that produce the “othering” of people (Comerford, 2005), often the result of unintentional, every-day practices of

well-meaning educators (Tisdell, 1995; Young, 1990). Just as social work education asks students to “recognize the extent to which a culture’s structures and values may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create or enhance privilege and power” (Council on Social Work Education, 2008b, EP 2.1.4), it must ask itself to do the same—to identify how its own culture reflects the privileging and oppressing elements of the culture-at-large—and adapt its practices accordingly. As part of its evolution, social work education must continue to identify and reduce the re-creation of social structures that marginalize under-prepared students within the learning environment. Gaining such awareness requires social work education, and the educators who comprise it, to be reflexive, to explore and identify underlying assumptions—the taken-for-granted meanings—asccribed to the everyday practices of working with students.

BSW programs use both explicit and implicit curricula to develop students as future social workers (Holosko, Skinner, MacCaughelty, & Stahl, 2010). These curricula are guided by the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) developed by the Council on Social Work Education (2008b), the accrediting body for schools of social work in the United States. The explicit curriculum includes the programmatic courses and course content—the stated skills, values, knowledge, and behaviors infused throughout program activities. The implicit curriculum comprises a program’s social environment and culture. According to the EPAS, the implicit curriculum includes a “program’s commitment to diversity; admissions policies and procedures; advisement, retention, and termination policies; student participation in governance; faculty; administrative structure; and resources” (Council on Social Work Education, 2008b, EP 3.0). Together, the explicit and implicit curricula address both what is communicated in

a BSW program and the way in which it is communicated. These curricula also provide a framework for understanding the ways in which social work educators may influence the experiences of under-prepared students. Unspoken social and cultural expectations and norms; course content and the way that content is presented; relationships among educators, between educators and students, between the program and students, and among students; programmatic and classroom policies; and the supports provided to students by individual educators or the program are all considered programmatic elements that shape students' experiences and that can influence their development as future professionals. These programmatic elements are developed, influenced, adapted, fostered, or inhibited by social work educators.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Using the three categories of theory, practice, and policy, the following literature review describes the ways that educators influence the academic context in which under-prepared students learn. First, a discussion of socio-cultural capital theory provides a model for understanding the systemic interaction of students and educators. Second, an appraisal of key teaching methods demonstrates how educators may directly influence under-prepared students. Third, an analysis of educational policy illustrates how educators may indirectly influence under-prepared students. Finally, the gap in literature related to educators' perspectives provides a basis for the current study.

Socio-Cultural Capital Theory

Socio-cultural capital theory provides a model for understanding the relationships among social work educators, institutions of higher education, and under-prepared students; in particular, it illustrates the spheres of power and influence in which these relationships occur (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Emirbayer & Williams, 2005; Pinto & Francis, 2005). Two overlapping concepts help define socio-cultural capital: 1) social capital, a network of reciprocal relationships that allows individuals to leverage social and material resources (Pinto & Francis, 2005), and 2) cultural capital, an individual's understanding of and ability to negotiate dominant cultural norms, both implicit and explicit (Collier & Morgan, 2008). Together, social capital and cultural capital form the currency that individuals can exchange for personal benefit or to help achieve personal goals. The value of socio-cultural capital is determined by the social and cultural contexts in which it is earned and spent, much like financial capital. An individual with two U.S. dollars is likely able to purchase a cup of coffee anywhere in the United

States—U.S. dollars are the socially and culturally accepted currency in the U.S., and the value of two U.S. dollars is commonly accepted as the value of a cup of coffee.

However, this same individual may have difficulty purchasing a cup of coffee in Germany (a different social and cultural context) with her two U.S. dollars. The German coffeehouse may only accept Euros—the socially and culturally accepted currency in Germany—or, if the coffeehouse accepts U.S. dollars, the value of two U.S. dollars may not be accepted as the value of a cup of coffee; maybe coffee is more highly valued in Germany, and it may cost someone three or four U.S. dollars. The capital held by an individual is valued only when expressed in socially sanctioned ways (dollars versus Euros) and in socially equitable terms (two dollars for coffee in the U.S. versus three or four dollars for coffee in Germany). Social and cultural contexts determine the type of capital that can be used and the value of that capital—how much a certain amount of capital is worth.

Another concept helpful to understanding socio-cultural capital is what Bourdieu calls *habitus* (Emirbayer & Williams, 2005), or an individual's second-nature disposition or tendencies. Behaviors that enhance or hinder the acquisition of socio-cultural capital stem from *habitus*. This instinctive temperament and the subsequent behaviors are formed through early childhood (primary *habitus*) and later social contexts such as extended family, school, and community groups (secondary *habitus*). Primary *habitus* and secondary *habitus* tend to reflect the social and cultural contexts in which they developed. Thus, resulting behaviors tend to reflect socio-cultural capital that is valued in these formative contexts. When moving into new social and cultural contexts, the *habitus* tends to stay consistent, meaning individuals will instinctively respond to new

environments as if they are responding to formative environments. If these responses, or behaviors, are valued in the new environments, then the individual may gain socio-cultural capital. However, when these responses are less valued or not valued by the new environment, the individual will have difficulty acquiring socio-cultural capital.

Socio-cultural capital exists only within relationships among individuals in a social environment. Any social environment is like a gaming field and each individual in the field is a player (Emirbayer & Williams, 2005). The field can be small with a low number of players like a small classroom, or the field can be large with a high number of players like an entire university. Players in the field possess varying amounts of capital. These differing amounts serve to advantage or disadvantage individuals in relation to the other players in the field. Players in the strongest positions possess *habitus* (or instincts) that are best suited for negotiating the opportunities and challenges presented within a given field. Those in the weakest positions demonstrate *habitus* that are ill-suited for responding to the expectations of the field.

To maintain a strong position, dominant players will likely take a conservation strategy—they will work to maintain the current distribution of capital (Emirbayer & Williams, 2005). Weaker players tend to adopt a subversive strategy aimed at disrupting the current distribution of capital—they will act in ways that seek to re-define and to re-distribute capital. More simply stated, players either try to protect the current rules of the game or they try to change the rules of the game, depending on how the current rules advantage or disadvantage the respective players (Emirbayer & Williams, 2005). These strategies represent innate, systemic values of cultures and subcultures, what hooks (2010) calls “colonizing mentality” and “decolonizing mentality,” respectively. A

colonizing mentality seeks to maintain “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchal values” (p. 15) while a decolonizing mentality rejects racist, sexist, and classist rules of the game. For Bourdieu, the educational system is the primary venue for the culture of the dominant class to be transferred and reinforced (Collier & Morgan, 2008).

When the culture in which under-prepared students develop differs from dominant culture, they are often insecure about their abilities to understand and follow the rules of the dominant culture—higher education and professional practice. Under-prepared BSW students, in particular, are faced with the daunting task of *acquiring* social and cultural capital in their role as an undergraduate student while simultaneously *using* (or spending) this capital in their role as young professionals (Onolemhemen, Rea, & Bowers, 2008; Saenz & Barrera, 2007). Developing the social and cultural capital conducive to an educational environment is challenging without the corresponding *habitus*, or instincts, that fits the dominant educational culture and allows under-prepared students to respond to the array of unspoken expectations that construct the playing field of a professional program (Emirbayer & Williams, 2005). Confronted with an environment which they cannot yet navigate, students may attempt to challenge the rules by which the “game” is played and can be perceived as unable or unwilling to learn (Emirbayer & Williams, 2005; Isserlis, 2008; Sanoff, 2006). Socio-cultural capital theory helps account for differences between students’ pre-college cultures and the culture of higher education, and how these differences can affect student performance on the gaming fields of education.

Socio-cultural capital theory provides context for how past social and cultural environments may influence a student's ability to navigate new environments—settings that reflect dominant social norms. However, socio-cultural capital theory is primarily descriptive. While it explains why some students struggle in higher education, it does not explicitly suggest how social work educators might better engage with these students. By implication, social work educators who view education as a vehicle for social and economic justice can help under-prepared students learn and follow dominant norms within higher education. However, framing the needs of under-prepared students as mandates to learn dominant social norms may imply the “colonization mentality” described by hooks (2010). hooks (2010) suggests that, even when they embrace dominant social norms, under-prepared students may still not succeed in higher education, primarily because they instinctively fulfill their “outsider status” (p. 26)—society has groomed them for failure in higher education. Given a social worker's responsibility, and by extension, a social work educator's responsibility, to challenge dominant and oppressive social norms, socio-cultural capital theory presses social work educators to re-examine their day-to-day interactions with under-prepared students, and the ways these interactions maintain dominant social structures that reinforce the “othering” of under-prepared students in BSW programs.

Practices

Collectively, student-centered practices—methods that focus on the ways that students learn and the contextual elements that influence learning— represent a renewed focus on the *process* of learning rather than the *products* of learning (King, 2005). Practices that are student-centered and holistic, that begin with students' current

understandings and address students' personal and professional development, contribute to academic success (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). King (2005) asserts that these practices not only create new knowledge for learners, but they also foster new *ways* of knowing and understanding. Student-centered practices take students beyond success in the classroom and enhance their abilities to deal with everyday life.

Many practices intended to support learning for *all* students were collectively identified by Chickering and Gamson's (1987) principles for quality undergraduate education. The original seven principles included faculty-student interaction, student-student interaction, active learning, prompt feedback, time on task, high expectations, and respect for diversity. Research on various interpretations of these principles demonstrated significant contributions to academic success (Chickering & Gamson, 1999; Kuh, Pace, & Vesper, 1997; Kuh & Vesper, 1997). The following discussion adapts Chickering and Gamson's principles as they have emerged in contemporary research, and collapses the seven principles into three primary concepts—relationship building, active and experiential learning, and feedback provision. These three concepts are also applied to teaching-learning interactions with under-prepared students in social work education.

Relationship Building. Social interaction, in and out of the classroom, is critical to creating, understanding, and applying ideas as well as keeping students engaged in the learning process (Halawah, 2006; Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2006). As students build relationships with faculty members and peers, they demonstrate gains in personal and professional development (Berger, 1992; Halawah, 2006; Reason et al., 2006). Relationships help students feel connected to a learning community—a process that

Prospero and Vohra-Gupta (2007) call “social integration” (p. 966). These social connections help students engage with course concepts and self-identify as *learners*; they adopt an academic life—a trait associated with higher grade point averages (GPAs) (Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007). Social connections and the subsequent adoption of an academic-self emerge from the literature as key to academic success for students who may be at-risk for poor scholarship.

Under-prepared students benefit from two types of social connections: faculty-student relationships and peer relationships. Faculty-student relationships include student relationships with instructors, advisors, staff, and mentors. Peer relationships comprise the social bonds that form among students. As students build relationships with instructors and other students, they develop new understandings of values, expectations, and norms—social context—that help them navigate personal and professional realms. Better understanding of social contexts contributes to better academic performance (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Pinto & Francis, 2005). Faculty-student relationships and peer relationships benefit all students, but they are especially important for under-prepared students.

Faculty-student relationships. Faculty-student relationships formed in and out of the classroom help students develop skills necessary for academic success. Ishiyama (2002, 2007) found that student-faculty mentoring relationships built through course-related collaborations improved higher-order thinking (logical, critical thought) and field-specific skills for social science students from under-prepared populations. When faculty members invited under-prepared students to discuss and work together on program-specific concepts, students spent more time on learning material and practicing skills.

This structured time with course content results in knowledge and skill gain. For under-prepared students, these gains are less likely without social interaction with the instructor.

Advising relationships play a critical role in the academic success of students. Negroni-Rodriguez, Dicks, and Morales (2006) developed a five-component model for culturally competent advising of Latino/a students in social work education. Central to this model are faculty-student relationships. Advisors fulfill multiple roles that facilitate both the personal and professional development of students. When a faculty member recognizes students as individuals, attempts to understand personal histories and cultures, and values the contributions of individual students, students build connections to the academic program that lead to perseverance and retention. These mentoring relationships also socialize students to professional social work values and behaviors (Negroni-Rodriguez et al., 2006). Marginalized students are more likely to succeed in social work programs when genuine, working relationships are developed with program staff.

Early development of faculty-student relationships is important for under-prepared students. Faculty can guide students in navigating new experiences and expectations and help them prioritize sometimes competing responsibilities. According to Berger (1992), these relationships become especially important when difficulties arise. Under-prepared students are more likely to persist in school if they can access a trusted faculty or staff member for support.

Peer Relationships. Social work educators should provide opportunities for BSW students to develop social networks. These social networks help students manage stress related to academic integration and performance. Support from friends has a positive effect on students' ability to endure through a course or an academic program, and helps

students manage stress, academic or otherwise (Berger, 1992; Pinto & Francis, 2005; Wilks & Spivey, 2010). Pinto and Francis (2005) found that a greater number of friends was related to lower stress and depression. Wilks and Spivey (2010) believe that, "Support from friends was the lone support factor that moderated the stress-resilience relationship" (p. 283). Peer relationships not only contribute to a general sense of well-being, but improve the retention and academic success of students.

Academic success linked to higher levels of peer support among peers is especially evident for under-prepared students. Discussing course related material with peers contributes to gains in learning associated with course content (Pike & Kuh, 2005). Additionally, Pascarella et al. (2004) found that under-prepared students "derived greater outcome benefits from extracurricular involvement and peer interaction than other students *even though they were significantly less likely to be engaged in these activities during college*" (p. 278, italics in original) So, under-prepared students are more likely to be "left out" socially, but when they interact with peers, under-prepared students demonstrate greater individual academic gains. Social interaction and supportive relationships are important for all students to succeed in school, but they are most important for under-prepared students.

The classroom is a primary setting for students to develop these supportive relationships. Educators have little influence on students' access to peer support outside of the classroom, so the classroom serves as a key venue for instructors to promote student interaction and help students build social networks (Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005; Wilks & Spivey, 2010). Supportive relationships in the classroom promote learning of course-specific content, and also extend benefits to overall academic success

by strengthening students' connection to a larger learning community. Through the classroom, instructors can offer a structured format for students to develop a sense of belonging.

Peer relationships are essential to a sense of belonging, and a sense of belonging is critical for under-prepared students to adopt a student or learner role. According to Wilcox, Winn, and Fyvie-Gauld (2005), peer relationships become the primary source of support for persistence and achievement in higher education. "The presence or lack of social support networks and supportive interactions is a major factor for students in deciding whether to stay or leave" (Wilcox et al., 2005, p. 720). These relationships supplant the support of family and friends at home. Peer relationships help students acclimate to the culture of higher education, and also ease the transition into an unfamiliar environment. Although peer relationships tend to focus on social integration within an educational setting, a sense of belonging frees students from worry about "being liked" and allows them to redirect attention toward academic performance. Without social integration, there is no academic integration.

Creating a sense of belonging also helps develop and maintain diversity in social work programs. Minority students are attracted and retained by social networks (Pinto & Francis, 2005). Informal social networks of support are crucial to persistence in school, especially if a student's identity traits are dissimilar from the majority (Pike & Kuh, 2005). For students who differ from the "majority" student, consistent and structured social interaction helps moderate the "othering" that can occur when students rely solely on independent networking. Social work educators can promote diversity among

students and encourage new understandings of diversity by creating structured opportunities for students to socialize, both in and out of the classroom.

Active and Experiential Learning. Active learning requires students to learn by doing—interacting, researching, writing, thinking, discussing, practicing, creating, analyzing, synthesizing—rather than by passively absorbing knowledge through the traditional lecture method. Active learning methods benefit all students, but none more than the under-prepared student (Gabriel, 2008). A specific type of active learning is experiential learning, when students engage with course concepts in real-world contexts, e.g., case studies, volunteering, shadowing, practica, internships. Experiential methods help students learn to manage their own learning while still increasing their knowledge (Lam, 2004). Brookfield (1993) states that a learner's ability to exercise control over his or her educational decisions is critical to self-directed learning. Garrison's (1997) model includes self-management, or the learner's ability to shape contextual conditions of learning, as a necessary element in achieving learning goals. In addition to learning new content, active learning requires students to develop new learning behaviors—skills that are often underdeveloped among under-prepared students. Experiential methods improve skills in collaboration, negotiation, and leadership, enhance appreciation for differing perspectives, and result in higher levels of student-reported enjoyment of their educational experience (Anderson & Harris, 2005; Lam, 2004; Sable, Larrivee, & Gayer, 2001). Using a variety of active learning methods in social work education is critical to improving the academic success of at-risk students who otherwise demonstrate potential as future social workers.

Professional values and skills are developed and understood better when used in context with real people and in real situations. Knight and Sutton (2004) suggest that learning is most useable in the context of its creation. Connections between new and existing knowledge, and the implications of these connections, are best understood when developed *in vivo*—in “real-life” situations. Students learn to match the most appropriate tools for a given job while *doing* the job. Additionally, students can actually develop better tools for the job. Knowledge also becomes more accessible for future application and adaptation through this type of contextual learning (Dzubak, 2006). Information is only useful when students understand why they are learning it and how it connects with every-day life.

One critique of experiential methods is that students demonstrate slightly less knowledge on objective testing. Lam (2004) suggests that when students using experiential methods to prepare for objective tests, they must rely on notes derived from self-directed learning instead of notes written during focused lecture on content. Less structured, informal notes may not prepare students for reciting concrete terms or definitions associated with objective testing. However, Lam (2004) found that social work students in an experiential setting retain their acquired knowledge for longer periods of time compared to students in a more lecture-based setting.

Social work students exposed to course content through real-world scenarios and asked to apply that content within a practical context demonstrate deeper understanding of course concepts and more critical application in real-life settings. Learners must use or act upon new knowledge in order to develop connections between new information and existing knowledge (Kane, 2004). Students create a tighter “fit” between ideas and

their application when a course includes experiential learning (Anderson & Harris, 2005). O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) suggest that adult students in undergraduate courses possess an "implicit theory of situated cognition" (p. 319)—they express that they learn skills best by performing these skills in relevant contexts.

Social work educators frequently strive to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Experiential learning helps build that bridge. Valentine and Freeman (2000) note that asking students to immediately apply concepts in class builds connections between theory and practice. Applying concepts to case studies or practice scenarios allows students to bridge the classroom and practice context. When asked to create this bridge, students also take the information with them, "instead of leaving it in the classroom" (Valentine & Freeman, 2000, p. 161). Students are more likely to use new knowledge gained through experiential learning; students continue to apply new knowledge over time in practice settings.

Integrating students' personal experiences with course content is one way to help under-prepared students connect classroom concepts with life outside of school. Negroni-Rodriguez et al. (2006) state, "Helping students to successfully adapt to and complete [social work programs] may require addressing issues of cultural adaptation, language, migration/immigration, racism, oppression, and discrimination" (p. 211). Instructors can leverage the first-hand experience of social work students to create a foundation for learning about social justice issues. Comerford (2005) promotes the narrative approaches fostered by hooks or Kolb—students sharing personal stories that represent students' experiences with course concepts. Onolemhemen, Rea, and Bowers (2008) suggest using Knowles' broader andragogical (adult) teaching methods which

focus on students' life experiences as a basis for problem-solving—using students' current knowledge as the starting point for problem analysis and solution development. This type of integration of personal experiences and course content benefit all students. It helps make course content more meaningful and offers richer discussion rooted in real-life contexts.

Another approach, peer instruction, involves peer discussion of course concepts that encourages students to learn from one another and clarify their own understanding of course concepts. It often follows an instructor's brief presentation and assessment of a concept. According to Lasry, Mazur, and Watkins (2008), this type of active learning contributes to greater conceptual understanding, problem-solving, and classroom retention than more passive learning, such as lecture alone. More importantly, similar gains are demonstrated by students with and without high levels of background knowledge. This finding suggests that both well-prepared and under-prepared students benefit academically from peer interaction.

Students gain deeper and longer-term understanding of concepts through active discussion, in and out of the classroom. O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) found that students initially express a lack of understanding related to course content explored through discussion; however, over time, it is the concepts learned through discussion that students readily retrieve, rather than content stated by instructors. Active discussion not only contributes to grasping content, but, as discussed in the context of peer relationships above, it also helps students develop a sense of belonging. Since interaction is necessary for learning, it is a necessary practice for membership in the learning community

(O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007). As students engage with peers and discuss ideas, they begin to see themselves as full, contributing citizens of the higher education world.

Active learning methods can initially cause discomfort for students and instructors alike. Instructors focused on student-centered learning must adapt their role from content expert to process expert. Similarly, students transitioning from passive forms of learning must adjust to greater demands for personal responsibility for their learning. Kember (2009) states that "disciplines which rely principally on more didactic forms of teaching run the danger of reinforcing the preference for passive forms of learning which many students assimilate during their schooling" (p. 12). In contrast, Dzubak (2006) emphasizes that today's students expect active and interactive classrooms. They are accustomed to contexts that capture their attention (Jones & Healing, 2010). Although students must learn new ways to engage with college level material, classes that use active learning strategies are more likely to help students interact with new information in familiar ways, making the information more accessible. Whether students are comfortable with passive forms of learning or expect attention-grabbing classrooms, active learning methods are important to help under-prepared students transition to higher education and complete a professional program.

Feedback Provision. The term “feedback” describes formal and informal assessment of and communication about the progress of students’ knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and skills. Feedback from self and others is necessary for students to make meaning from the new concepts encountered through coursework. Classroom assessments allow learners to identify connections or disconnections between their learning and larger social contexts or expectations. Conceição (2007) and King (2005)

suggest that educators must help students evaluate their learning for students to progress. AlHaqwi, van der Molen, Schmidt, and Magzoub (2010) found that students in clinical professions want and benefit from frequent and direct feedback. Instructors must provide consistent, timely, and supportive feedback throughout a course and thereby serve as guides for student learning. Collier and Morgan (2008) argue that feedback helps students talk about classroom expectations, understand the instructor's expectations, and recognize resources for meeting those expectations. Through consistent and direct feedback, under-prepared students develop socio-cultural capital—an understanding of and ability to negotiate expectations inherent in higher education.

Students recognize that their use of feedback is often dependent on the way in which feedback is given; if feedback is given in a way that communicates care for the student, the feedback is more likely to be sought and used (AlHaqwi et al., 2010).

AlHaqwi et al. (2010) found that teachers also recognized the need to hone skills at providing feedback so that it is more easily digestible by students. Verbal and written feedback is most useful when it is specific, avoids critique of personal characteristics, focuses on skills and tasks, and emphasizes desired behaviors (Richardson, 2010).

Although statements like "Well done" may communicate support, they are not particularly useful for developing competencies. Identifying specific tasks that are done well or that require adaptation help students focus their efforts to improve. Feedback identifying specific desired behaviors also helps students focus their efforts. A student who hears an instructor say "you speak too softly when presenting in class" may still not understand what is expected of him. When instructors communicate what they want to see from the student, such as "look up and out toward the audience, announce, and

“speak loud enough so that the students in the back row can hear you,” they offer students clearer expectations of performance. Generally, evaluating personal characteristics should be avoided, but might be necessary in a social science profession such as social work. Some personal characteristics reflect criteria for professional practice, and instructors must provide feedback related to these behaviors. However, the feedback should connect personal characteristics to the competencies expected of a skilled professional (Richardson, 2010).

Critical self-reflection and other forms of self-assessment should be incorporated into the feedback process. In some contexts, informal self-feedback can influence learning, and may take the form of simple trial and error, success and failure; students may ask if the new knowledge or skills, when applied, function appropriately (Merriam et al., 2007). In the context of higher education, integrating self-assessment with instructor and peer feedback allows a student to identify discrepancies between oneself and others; the comparison provides a platform for increased self-awareness (Wood, Hassell, Whitehouse, Bullock, & Wall, 2006). Self-awareness helps students create meaning related to their learning—how new information and skills fit with prior knowledge, and how this learning might be used. Garrison (1997) suggests the idea of self-assessment in his concept of self-monitoring—developing “an awareness of and an ability to think about our thinking” (p. 23). Thinking about our thinking helps us make sense of new information, to create meaning for our personal and professional lives through critical analysis.

Toward this end, Ash and Clayton (2004) suggest helping students adopt a structured process for critical self-reflection—a feedback loop rooted in experiential

learning. Creating structure to reflect on experience helps learners extract the meaning (learning) from their experience, and use that meaning to guide future practices. Lay and McGuire (2010) adapted this structured approach specifically for social work education, and observe that the process helps students take a reflexive stance toward social work, but also “creates the context for life-long learning” (p. 547). This type of self-feedback spans personal and professional realms. When practiced consistently, engaging in self-assessment helps students create connections between new and old information, and internal and external contexts, which are necessary for personal and professional development.

Implications for Social Work Education. The accreditation standards for social work education follow a model in which products are emphasized over processes. “Academic excellence” is equated with products, not the process by which these outcomes are pursued. The Council on Social Work Education (2008b) lists competencies (products) that students must demonstrate prior to graduation; however, it concedes differentiation in practices to develop those competencies. The process quality is judged by its respective products. Individual programs may expect student-centered practices from instructors, yet the profession retains its emphasis on student products. Ironically, the literature credits process-oriented practices as contributing to better products—developing and sustaining competencies among students—both in and out of school (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Lam, Wong, Hui, Lee, & Chan, 2006; O’Donnell & Tobbell, 2007; Valentine & Freeman, 2000).

Renewed focus on process-oriented practices cannot be equated with creating efficient processes (Leonard, 1994; Levin, 2007). Burdens associated with maintaining

fiscal viability or growth often drive programmatic goals, and efficiency becomes a standard for evaluating processes (Levin, 2007). However, efficiency's primary concern is with product—how does education measure student competencies in less time or with fewer resources? An efficient process is a means to an end; its purpose is to replicate products within measured parameters. When applied to education, efficient processes can lose sight of the humanity of students—the social and creative elements of students that give meaning to education. As Leonard (1994) stated, “The practices that gather us together in human community and give richness and meaning wither into empty and meaningless rituals in the face of [efficient processes]” (p. 50). When higher education's focus on process is equated with efficiency, students *become* the products of education; they personify the skills, knowledge, and values that fulfill vocation-related roles and employer-specific expectations. Astin (1999), Levin (2007), and Lindeman (1926/1989) asserted that students can become commodities that meet workforce needs or boost university reputations, the result of focusing on products over process. When creating efficient programs that respond to competing demands from stakeholders, student-centered practices—practices that recognize students as social and contextual learners—can get lost. More critically, Freire (1974/2010) might say that the students themselves get lost. When education serves as a mechanism for adapting students to society's needs, students are objectified—dehumanized. The person is replaced by the product he or she now represents.

Process-oriented practices refocus education on the learner—practices become “student-centered.” Student-centered, process-oriented practices help students create meaning from their learning—the fundamental building block of knowledge, skills, and

values. According to Clark (as cited in Merriam et al., 2007), "When we are learning something new, we're trying to make sense of it, to figure out its internal logic and how it's related to what we already know" (p. 210). Practices that recognize the social and contextual elements of learning help students "make sense" of new knowledge and skills (Garrison, 1997; Kane, 2004; Merriam & Roberson, 2005). Process-oriented practices that use relationship building, experiential learning, and feedback help students build connections among knowledge, skills, and values, and develop new understandings of social contexts that structure human interaction. These connections and understandings are akin to Freire's (1974/2010) concept of critical consciousness—a way of being that allows students to constructively assess and actively participate in their world, rather than simply adjust to it. Developing students' abilities to actively participate in their everyday world, i.e., developing practical wisdom, is an empowering act of social justice, and social justice is the primary mission of the social work profession. Not only do student-centered, process-oriented practices empower students, they also lead to higher-quality and longer-lasting professional skills (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Lam et al., 2006; O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007; Valentine & Freeman, 2000)—these practices help social work instructors meet the two, often competing, goals of undergraduate professional programs: training competent professionals and preparing students to navigate everyday life. Failing to consistently and competently implement these practices compromises the professional integrity and ethical obligations of social work education.

Policy

The mission, scope, and outcomes of social work education are long debated issues, both within and outside of the profession. In part, the training of new social

workers helps define the profession and differentiate it from other fields of practice. In her assessment of social work education's evolution, McGrath Morris (2008) states, "Social work education may be characterized by an ongoing tension between specialization and general training" (p. 49). Although McGrath Morris' statement refers to the potential breadth of social work skills, it also suggests a tenuous relationship between general, personal development (practical wisdom) and specific, professional development (academic skills) within baccalaureate social work (BSW) programs. The mission of social work education is to prepare competent practitioners, including those at the baccalaureate level (Council on Social Work Education, 2008b). Simultaneously, "an undergraduate education should prepare students to understand and deal intelligently with modern life" (Chickering & Gamson, 1987, p. 3). Grappling with these sometimes competing demands means grappling with the policies that define them. These policies outline expectations, rules, and measures for general academic success and civic participation, along with specific standards for professional behavior and competent practice. At an undergraduate level, academic policies can define both personal and professional success.

The Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) developed by the Council on Social Work Education (2008b) guide curriculum design and policy development within schools of social work across the United States. These policies define the expectations of social work training—BSW students are expected to emerge with a set of core competencies as beginning professionals. At the same time, undergraduate students are also acclimating to the culture of higher education and acquiring broad social skills for negotiating a pluralistic culture outside of the classroom.

Developing such diverse social and professional skills in the new context of college may require significant adjustment for under-prepared students—students on the social and educational margins—especially when family-of-origin cultures differ from higher education norms (Dillon, 2007). As more under-prepared students pursue BSW degrees, social work programs may struggle to respond to and prioritize the different needs of students. These issues raise questions of how to best achieve personal and professional growth within an increasingly specialized and market-oriented system of higher education. The burden weighs heavily on social work programs which also strive to protect the profession and future consumers. BSW programs must ensure that students demonstrate suitability for social work education, and skill competency both during and on completion of training.

Standards for evaluating suitability for social work practice are integral to the profession; that is, all students must demonstrate core competencies commensurate with their education level regardless of personal background and culture. Using these core competencies as a foundation for social work education, the CSWE recognizes that individual schools will inevitably interpret social work education through their own lenses. As part of its stated intent, EPAS seeks to “promote comparability across programs with a level of flexibility that encourages programs to differentiate” (Council on Social Work Education, 2008b, Purpose, ¶ 3). This differentiation is expressed in the details of educational policy respective to each social work program, details that can advantage and disadvantage historically under-prepared students. The following discussion explores the overall policy context in which BSW programs function, and then

examines how policy can balance high standards for professional practice and promote justice among a diverse student body.

Overall Policy Context. Policies guiding matriculation, advancement, and graduation serve two purposes for BSW education: first, they set the minimum qualifications for student success expected by the governing higher education institutions (HEI), and second, they set the minimum qualifications for competent practice expected by the social work profession. The former qualifications promote overall quality standards for institutional, programmatic, and student outcomes (Collins & Mowbray, 2005). The latter qualifications promote profession-specific quality standards, including ethical standards that protect consumers, the profession, and society (Cole, 1991). These policies must offer potential and current students equal opportunity, but different programs can have different standards for competency and behavior, as long as these standards are higher than the basic qualifications stipulated by law. For example, social work programs may establish higher standards than the governing HEI for assessing competency related to disability status when disability status jeopardizes professional practice; in this case, social work programs must explicitly define what might hinder students from future knowledgeable, skillful, and ethical practice (Cole, 1991). Along with following public law, social work programs must apply educational policy consistently and adhere to published policies with all students.

Along with protecting the profession, adhering to public law, and applying policy consistently, social work follows its own professional values, including empowering people and promoting diversity. The coherence among these standards is often unclear, especially as social work programs encounter students who are under-prepared for higher

education, but demonstrate potential as future practitioners. “There should be some evidence that there are relationships between admission standards, likely program success, and alumnae ethical and responsible conduct as professionals” (Cole, 1991, p. 23). Tam and Colman (2009) agree, but assert that accreditation policies (which guide program policy) are open to broad interpretation. Although movement toward better competency measurement is needed to protect clients and the profession, initial screening for competencies relies on subjective perceptions (Dillon, 2007; Holmstrom & Taylor, 2008b). Matriculation policies often focus on educational outcomes measured at later stages of the process rather than behaviors equivalent to students’ experience at the time of program application.

Screening for students who are unlikely to be successful in a social work program benefits under-prepared students who will not complete their degree. Yates and James (2006) suggest that, while undertaking higher education, students accrue debt, and schools, philanthropic organizations, and the government spend grant monies in support of students. When students do not finish coursework, the students' debt remains and grant monies are lost without the benefit of a completed degree. Dissuading students from taking on potentially unmanageable debt without a diploma aligns with social work ethics by helping prevent (further) financial oppression.

Although there are advantages to rigorous matriculation, advancement, and graduation policies—protection for both students and the public—they can inadvertently disadvantage students who do not fit the model of a traditional learner when these policies lack clarity, cohesion, and relevance (Dillon, 2007; Holmstrom & Taylor, 2008a, 2008b; Ting, Morris, McFeaters, & Eustice, 2006). Behaviors like academic dishonesty

are more clearly defined, but interpersonal competencies can be difficult to measure. For example, policies intending to protect the profession may too narrowly define professional competence (e.g., scores on objective or standardized tests), or allow for broad interpretation (e.g., different instructors assessing student competence differently); they may screen out students who are unable to navigate academic-specific expectations, even when these students may possess personal characteristics well-suited for the profession (Holmstrom & Taylor, 2008b; Tam & Coleman, 2009). These policies may not build upon one another to recognize appropriate growth over time—perhaps expecting senior-level performance in a sophomore-level activity. Gaps in policy may fail to offer reasonable supports to students who, with appropriate tools and resources, can improve their academic performance to meet program expectations. Policies need to be clearly defined for assessing student characteristics that represent professional aptitude and success; they must span the personal and professional domains, and allow for student development over the course of social work training (Dillon, 2007; Holmstrom & Taylor, 2008a, 2008b; Ting et al., 2006). Policies lacking clarity, cohesion, and relevance not only disadvantage under-prepared students, but also undermine social work’s commitment to diversity and empowerment.

Upholding diverse professional commitments requires educational policy to span the personal and professional dimensions. In other words, social work programs must attend to both academic measures and “non-academic” qualities that offer a more holistic assessment of suitability for the profession (Holmstrom & Taylor, 2008b; Tam & Coleman, 2009). Although there is a relationship between past academic performance and future academic performance, Holmstrom and Taylor (2008b) contend that attention

to previous academic performance is not sufficient for selection for social work programs. Personal qualities are equally vital to professional suitability (Dillon, 2007; Tam & Coleman, 2009; Yates & James, 2006). Similar to the relationship between past and future academic performance, past personal behaviors are strong predictors of future behaviors (Yates & James, 2006). Policies that consider both personal and academic measures provide stronger assessments for professional suitability.

Deeper exploration of an applicant's past behaviors and practices may offer additional insight to gauge suitability for competent practice. However, measuring personal qualities entails subjective judgments which are difficult to operationalize through respective policies (Dillon, 2007; Holmstrom & Taylor, 2008b). Using the personal qualities valued by consumers (Dillon, 2007) and field instructors (Tam & Coleman, 2009) are two suggestions for defining suitability criteria. Additionally, policies that evaluate student references deserve scrutiny, especially for programs where students are allowed to select their own references (Yates & James, 2006). As schools attempt to be more inclusive of diverse students and use a wider range of screening tools, negative comments on references should be carefully and critically explored with each student. Student-selected references are likely to emphasize positive characteristics, and in a context where positive comments are highly probable, negative comments should receive critical attention.

More robust selection interviews may help with assessment for potential competent practice, as they offer direct interaction with program candidates. However, interviews require resources and consistency, and a body of literature suggests interviews are inconsistently effective for selecting eventual graduates (see Maidment & Briggs,

1998). Holmstrom and Taylor (2008b) found that students who were identified as struggling in social work programs scored well during application interviews—the interpersonal interaction suggested an initial fit with professional goals. "[Another] option might be for admissions tutors to select students with the ‘best’ academic attainment. However, academic skills do not necessarily equate with students having the appropriate personal qualities" (Dillon, 2007, p. 835). Dillon contends that concerns can emerge for academically gifted students at later stages in the training process, when students are undertaking practice placements. Although interviews offer additional information for student selection, over-reliance on either academic performance or personal qualities inadequately assesses for program success.

Comprehensive and progressive measurement throughout a program allows for admitting students who have a history of academic and life challenges, but who also demonstrate initial potential as a practitioner (Holmstrom & Taylor, 2008a, 2008b). Acceptance, even conditional acceptance, into a social work program is not the same as graduating incompetent practitioners—a process occurs before and between these point-in-time events. Social work programs are challenged to avoid marginalizing under-prepared students through policies intended to ensure “suitability” for the profession, while protecting the public and the profession. Policies that recognize the dynamic nature of student development during program progression—from initial application, through coursework and field placement, to final assessments of skill and character at graduation—represent more holistic approaches to evaluating student suitability for professional practice (Dillon, 2007; Holmstrom & Taylor, 2008a, 2008b; Ting et al., 2006). Bridging personal and professional domains through clear, cohesive, and relevant

educational policy helps expand diversity among students and practitioners while maintaining high academic and professional standards.

Implications for Social Work Education. The previous discussion explored the overall policy context in which BSW programs function and examined how policies balance personal development expected in an undergraduate program with professional development expected in an accredited professional program. This balance is especially challenging for social work programs charged with protecting the public and the profession by graduating competent practitioners, and fulfilling commitments to diversity and empowerment by curtailing the further marginalization of under-prepared students (Dillon, 2007). Three policy traits contribute to achieving this balance. First, policies should allow educators to span personal and professional domains by assessing both personal and academic measures. Second, policies should reflect progressive assessment over the life of the program, with stage-appropriate measures at matriculation, advancement, and graduation. Finally, policies should establish clear, cohesive, and relevant expectations—they should anticipate potential interpretations, build upon one another, and logically connect student knowledge, values, and behavior with desired professional practices. Programs that follow these guiding principles are best suited to educate all students, and promote competent and diverse practitioners.

Unanswered Questions

The student-centered focus in research on theory, practice, and policy related to under-prepared students often neglects the larger social context of higher education (Comerford, 2005). Jenkins (2009) indicated that college faculty often do not know how to connect with under-prepared students because they do not collect or use relevant

information about the experiences of these students. As Dzubak (2006) suggested, the historical contributions to under-preparation cannot be changed at the post-secondary level, but social work education can and will develop methods to improve academic performance and skill attainment. Refining educators' approaches requires a new understanding of the experiences of under-prepared students, and especially a new understanding of the entire system with which they interact (Jackson & Kurlaender, 2014). Understanding social work educators who work with students on a daily basis is critical to understanding this larger system.

Successful transitions into higher education for under-prepared students require both the institution and the student to adapt. Both must become aware of the power dynamics related to full participation and success, modify their own approach as necessary, and advocate for the other to collaborate in that process. If student-centered research finds that experiential learning improves student outcomes, then faculty should include more experiential learning activities. However, we do not know what it is like for faculty to implement those activities, or what contextual elements support or deter experiential methods. Exploring the experiences of educators faced with teaching under-prepared students will uncover larger systemic issues—the everyday interactions, events, and decisions—influencing BSW education.

The experience of social work educators who work with under-prepared college students is fundamentally absent in the literature. A search in Social Work Abstracts, an EBSCO Host database focused on the fields of social work and human services, limited to scholarly peer-reviewed sources from 1994 to 2014, was completed using various combinations of the following key terms:

- educator, teacher, faculty or instructor
- experience, lived experience, perspectives, or views
- under-prepared, under-preparation, or unprepared
- students, undergraduate students, or college students

These searches produced between 0 and 54 articles. Among these searches, a total of eight articles were determined to be focused on educator experiences, including articles that described the first-person observations of those articles' author. None of these articles were determined to be focused on educator experiences and under-prepared BSW students. Of the eight articles focusing on educator experiences, Calderwood and Degenhardt (2010), Helton (2010), Mason and Smith (2007), and Moore and Toliver (2010) also focus, respectively, on a student with a speech impairment, rural students, a student who is blind and deaf, and Black educators working with Black students at traditionally White colleges. Although these topics might be perceived as contributors to under-preparation, these topics in and of themselves do not necessitate under-preparation for success in college. The remaining four articles focused on either graduate students or under-graduate students, in general, prepared or otherwise.

Despite the lack of research specific to educators' experiences with under-prepared BSW students, related research suggests that educator experiences directly contribute to the experiences of under-prepared students in BSW programs. Educators are key players in the socio-cultural context of higher education and can influence students' ability to adapt to academic norms. Academic freedom, or the ability of faculty to choose teaching practices, allows instructors to control the teaching strategies used in the classroom—instructors determine the extent to which they promote relationships,

incorporate experiential learning, and provide consistent and timely feedback. Faculty committees are largely responsible for developing educational policy specific to BSW programs—faculty consensus determines application procedures, selection, advancement, and graduation criteria, curriculum objectives, competency measures, and grievance procedures, among many other policies. These types of influence make faculty members important players in the system of social work education. As the social work profession charges its members with understanding a system before changing that system, the larger BSW educational system must be better understood, including the experience of social work educators, before adapting BSW programs' responses to under-prepared students.

Research Purpose, Questions, and Implications

The purpose of this study is to investigate the experience of social work faculty who work with under-prepared students in Baccalaureate Social Work (BSW) programs. The whole of faculty members' experiences related to under-prepared students, both in and out of the classroom, was considered interview content. However, this research explored the underlying meaning faculty members created from these experiences and the role this meaning played in working with under-prepared students.

The primary research question is: How do social work educators make sense of the experience of working with under-prepared students in BSW programs? Two sub-questions were investigated to help uncover the primary concepts—*social work* educators and faculty roles—imbedded in the research question:

1. How do social work faculty members understand and interpret their role or roles as “social work educators?”

2. How do social work faculty members understand and interpret what it means to “work with” under-prepared students in BSW programs?

These questions lead to Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). IPA presents a structured, rigorous method for uncovering professional experiences and underlying meaning, which Richardson (2009) considered a potential method for uncovering practice wisdom. Austin and Packard (2009) identify practice wisdom as an ability to make good decisions and take appropriate actions in order to achieve desired outcomes. Further, this ability to judge and act is based on reflective knowledge and experience. Scholars from various fields argue for greater attention to the use of practice wisdom as valuable knowledge (Parton, 2000; Polkinghorne, 2004; Wilson, 1993). Parton (2000) suggests that social work needs to expand its use of unique and diverse human experiences to help guide its approach. According to Polkinghorne (2004), successful practice must use an approach “that emphasizes the situated judgment of practitioners” (p. 1). In the face of scientific inquiry that naively makes claims of prediction and control, Wilson (1993) encourages research that develops practitioners’ understanding of their work within context. This understanding, or insight, that comes from lived experience translates into the reflective insight that builds a professional’s capacity for better practice (i.e., making better decisions and taking more appropriate actions). By developing a deeper understanding of a phenomenon, interpretive phenomenology contributes to practice wisdom.

Practice wisdom is one of the building blocks of best practices—activities supported by scholarly evidence as most likely to achieve desired outcomes. Petr and Walter (2005) expanded a framework for developing and evaluating best practices that

expressly includes practice wisdom. The basis for their adaptation stems from an ethical mandate for the inclusion of consumer and practitioner perspectives—including consumer viewpoints, collective practice wisdom, and value-based evaluation informed by professional standards such as the NASW *Code of Ethics* (2007). One component of the Petr and Walter's (2005) model is an assessment of best practices in light of practice values and ethics. This step is rooted in the authors' belief that measures used for assessing best practices are "ultimately value criteria" (p. 260). Systematically and explicitly uncovering these value criteria and the practices they influence enables practitioners to refine best practices—to better apply ideas within appropriate contexts and achieve intended goals. Exploring the lived experience of tenured social work faculty who work with under-prepared students enhances the capacity for practice with under-prepared students.

Chapter III: Research Methods

This chapter describes the research design and rationale, including methodology, data collection, participant selection, and data analysis. Strategies for ensuring rigor and for addressing ethical considerations, including Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, are also explained. Finally, potential implications for social work education are discussed.

Research Design and Rationale

Understanding the everyday experience of teaching under-prepared students best fits the qualitative research method of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). There are several phenomenological methods, but interpretive phenomenology specifically seeks to understand situated-personhood—what it is like to *be* an individual *in* an everyday situation. Heidegger called situated-personhood “Dasein” (translated as “there-being”), and Heidegger’s mentor, Husserl, called everyday situations the “life-world,” the often mundane, taken-for-granted experiences we encounter each day (Smith et al., 2009). Pascal (2010) connects Heidegger’s approach, in particular, with social work:

In common with social work approaches, Heidegger’s central concerns were essentially humanistic, locating the individual in context of their life-worlds. Heidegger’s work also located the social and historical context of individual existence, therefore taking a structural, rather than personal, perspective. He emphasized the broader influences at hand, avoiding a pathologizing stance. Furthermore, temporality extends beyond historical contexts, and reminds social workers of the developmental unfolding of life, including the finitude of death. (p. 5)

Essentially, individuals constantly attempt to make sense of the world around them, and can only do so using lenses created by social context—historical experiences, social interactions, potential futures, and larger cultural norms and values (Pascal, 2010;

Wilcke, 2002). The individual and his social context are a cohesive unit—without the individual, there is no social context, and without a social context, there is no individual.

Reflexivity and Situating the Researcher

Heidegger's concept of situated-personhood in IPA extends to the researcher—a researcher cannot make sense of what is being studied apart from his own social context and life-world (Pascal, 2010; Wilcke, 2002). Prior to Heidegger, Husserl suggested that researchers could and should “bracket” their personal perspectives—they should acknowledge and then set aside personal perceptions, assumptions, or responses to focus on the experience of participants. However, Heidegger contended that researchers were incapable of bracketing—they could not separate their preconceived ideas from their interpretation of new ideas—and his phenomenological approach asked that researchers explore their personal perspectives as part of the interpretive process (Lavery, 2003; Pascal, 2010; Wilcke, 2002). Heidegger (1927/2008) maintained that every interpretation is filtered through the interpreter's history. Dahl and Boss (2005) agree, saying “...we are not separate from the phenomena we study” (p. 67). Likewise, IPA makes the researcher-researched relationship transparent in the research process.

The process of creating transparency is called reflexivity—an explicit self-exploration and presentation of the researcher's underlying assumptions related to the study (Sin, 2010). The initial presentation of the researcher's preconceptions is called situating the researcher—the researcher explicitly describes his background, his prior experience with the phenomenon, and his pre-conceived ideas prior to the research (Pascal, 2010). Then, the researcher consistently writes personal reflections throughout the research process, considers how these reflections fit with the narratives of

participants, and then reconsiders the possible interpretations of both self-reflective writings and participant narratives (Laverty, 2003; Pascal, 2010). Both the participant narratives and the researcher's reflections form research data. The research process becomes a dialogue between the researcher and participants as the researcher moves back and forth between participant narratives and personal reflections.

Participant Selection

Interpretive phenomenological studies select participants based on their experience with the phenomenon; eligibility criteria are determined by the phenomenon studied (Laverty, 2003). Although all participants should have lived-experience related to the focus of the study, some researchers suggest recruiting diverse participants to promote a richer understanding of the phenomenon (see Laverty, 2003; Pascal, 2010), but diverse participants enhance the interpretive process and are not a requirement. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) believe diversity among participants complicates the interpretive process, and recommend a homogeneous sample. They concede that the decision to interview similar participants depends on the nature of the study and the frequency with which people experience the phenomenon in question. If the experience is rare, the number of potential participants might be limited, and the researcher's decision about homogeneity becomes irrelevant. If the experience is common, then the researcher must decide if and how he will determine eligibility for participation (Smith et al., 2009). Regardless of other participant experiences or characteristics, the phenomenon in question drives the selection of participants—all participants must have lived-experience of the phenomenon.

Purposive sampling was used, meaning recruitment focused directly on participants who were likely to meet the stated criteria. Initial recruitment took place through the Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors' (2012) email listserv comprised of about 1,500 educators. The researcher sent an email message (Appendix A) to the listserv describing the study and the criteria for participation, and asked for volunteers who met the criteria and were interested in participating to contact the researcher for more information. Participants were also recruited through personal invitation by members of the researcher's dissertation committee, several of whom are active members in the community of undergraduate social work educators. Faculty members directly responsible for evaluating the researcher's work for degree completion were not eligible for participation. No monetary incentive was offered to any participant.

Sample sizes vary among IPA studies depending on the nature of the study and the depth to which a researcher intends to explore participant narratives. Padgett (2008) contends that phenomenological studies commonly sample six to 10 participants as the interviews prioritize depth over breadth. Although stating a sample size prior to conducting research is standard protocol for qualitative research within academia, the number of participants in an IPA study tends to evolve depending on the nature of the data collected—the depth and richness of participants' descriptions—during data analysis. Qualitative methods, and IPA specifically, often guide researchers to interview as many (or as few) participants necessary to reach saturation, or the point at which “a clearer understanding of the experience will not be found through further discussion with participants” (Laverty, 2003, p. 29). For doctoral students, Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) use number of interviews, between four and 10, rather than saturation or number

of participants as a guide for determining the scope of data collection. For example, if two interviews were conducted with five participants, then the researcher would have completed 10 interviews—the upper limit suggested by Smith, et al. for PhD candidates. Smith, et al. (2009) discourage temptations to accumulate larger numbers of participants, claiming that, “Successful analysis requires time, reflection, and dialogue, and larger datasets tend to inhibit all of these things, especially amongst less experienced qualitative researchers” (p. 52).

Given the recommendations above and the context of this study, 11 participants were interviewed who met the following criteria: a) taught at programs accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), b) taught undergraduate courses, and c) self-identified as instructors working with underprepared students—students whose academic performance did not meet the minimum expectations for college success and whose under-preparation may have been linked to one or more experiences reflecting social or economic marginalization. Initially, participants were sought who were tenured at the school for which they taught; however, the decision was made to expand the inclusion of non-tenured faculty members part way through the recruitment process to increase the number of eligible participants. Use of the tenure criterion was intended to help ensure that participants had experience with the phenomenon, but participants were able to demonstrate experience with the phenomenon in other ways, such as five or more years of teaching experience. It was also discovered that some schools did not award tenure but used long-term contracts. As tenure was not fundamental to the phenomenon, that criterion was discarded in favor of including participants who were able to communicate

that they had experience with the phenomenon and were able to discuss it with depth. No other socio-demographic factors were used to limit participation.

Data Collection: Hermeneutic Questioning

Interpretive phenomenological work is rooted in context and practice. Understanding the meaning individuals make from this context and practice requires “illuminating the details and seemingly trivial aspects within experience that may be taken for granted in our lives” (Laverty, 2003, p. 24). Understanding what it is like to work with under-prepared students requires more than a description of actions or events—a researcher must uncover the meaning educators make of this phenomenon.

Interpretive phenomenology collects data through a series of semi-structured interviews focused on uncovering meaning behind taken-for-granted activities and events. These interviews are considered dialogues—open-ended conversations using open-ended questions. This strategy redefines researchers and participants as co-researchers—co-creators—and grounds them in the “meanings, skills, practices, and embodied experiences” (Leonard, 1994, p. 56) associated with a phenomenon. For example, initial participant responses may seem mundane, full of words or phrases that are easily grasped. Participants might say they wanted students to do a better job at communicating with them. Grondin (1994) states that, “Whoever wants to understand something verbal in a hermeneutical manner must constantly attend to what is tacitly meant, though not openly expressed” (p. 101). When someone answers a question with a phrase like “better communication,” it would be easy to rely on a taken-for-granted understanding of the phrase, a preconception that may inadvertently misrepresent or even hide the answer offered by the participant (Moran, 2000). Follow up questions may

sound something like “How would you know if a student was communicating better? What would that look like?” Using this type of hermeneutic questioning grounds the phenomenon of “better communication” in the meaning and practices behind the words or language used; it uncovers more of the tacit meaning behind this phrase rather than simply relying on assumed preconceptions.

Not only can preconceptions obscure tacit meaning, they may also influence inquiry in a way that leads to predetermined answers. For example, in a previous phenomenological investigation of the experience of social work students studying leadership practice (see Murphy Nugen & Richardson, 2009), the researchers had significant experience within the field of leadership practice and conducted a literature review on the topic. Together, the practice experience and the literature review helped shape interview questions asked of participants. Unsurprisingly, the themes identified as integral to the phenomenon corresponded to the questions asked of each participant. In part, this was likely a symptom of inexperience with interpretive phenomenological inquiry, but it also demonstrated how research results may depend on the questions asked.

For research and for everyday interaction, preconceptions shape questions which then shape the answers found (Dunlop, 1994; Moran, 2000; Palmer, 1969; Plager, 1994). As Heidegger (1927/2008) states, “Every inquiry is a seeking. Every seeking gets guided before-hand by what is sought” (p. 5). To understand a phenomenon, researchers must question their own “vague average understanding” of the world in everyday situations (Heidegger, 1927/2008, p. 6). The meaning derived from everyday situations is often filtered through language—a representation of shared meaning—that is infinitely

interpretable (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The preconceived meaning ascribed to others' words may or may not accurately represent the intended meaning. As Delanty and Strydom (2003) state, "Although a concept belongs to a common or shared universe of discourse, scholars not only interpret the concepts differently but they actively disagree and contest each other's interpretations, claims and decisions" (p. 6).

Hermeneutic questioning helps uncover these different interpretations and helps explore the meanings and fundamental practices behind them. Both the interviewer and interviewee are asked to revisit preconceptions and open themselves to new interpretations that may arise with each new question, each new answer.

For the current study, interviews began with the request, "I'd like you to tell me a story about working with an under-prepared student that you feel best captures that experience for you." Examples of subsequent probing questions aimed at encouraging personal and meaningful stories may have included, "How do you make sense of that experience?" or "What does that experience [or behavior or work, etc.] look like?" or "As you reflect on your experiences working with under-prepared students, what would you like to say to new faculty members who might work with under-prepared students in the future?" A list of potential prompts is found in Appendix B, however, this list was developed to help the researcher prepare for using hermeneutic questioning and was used only as a reminder of the types of prompts that might be used with participants. Questions were not asked in a scripted format. Instead, each interview was conversational in nature. Following each interview, the researcher wrote notes documenting the researcher's personal observations and responses to the interaction (Smith et al., 2009). These notes aided in situating the researcher during data analysis.

Interviews took sixty to seventy-five minutes. To accommodate geographic distances, interviews were conducted over the phone. Each interview was digitally recorded, and the recordings were transcribed by a transcriptionist at Connecticut Secretary. The transcriptionist signed a confidentiality agreement (Appendix C) before accessing and transcribing any audio files. After each interview, the digital recording was uploaded to a password-protected account in the researcher's name at a secure website maintained by Connecticut Secretary. The transcriptionist accessed the files from this secure account, transcribed each interview, and then uploaded the transcription back into the researcher's password protected account on the same secure website. After accessing each transcription from this account, the researcher compared each transcription with the original digital recording to ensure accuracy. The researcher removed all identifying information for each participant from the transcripts and replaced this information with pseudonyms. Electronic copies of each transcript and digital recording were kept on a password-protected flash drive.

Data Analysis: Hermeneutic Circle

Analyzing data in interpretive phenomenology engages the researcher in a forward moving spiral called the hermeneutic circle (Smith et al., 2009). The hermeneutic circle represents movement between the researcher's perspectives and participants' perspectives (described in Situating the Researcher above), and also between the individual narratives and the entire body of narratives (Lavery, 2003; Pascal, 2010; Wilcke, 2002). The researcher reads, writes, and reflects on individual interviews (small pieces of data), considers their fit with the sum of all interviews (the whole of data); the researcher then reads, writes, and reflects on the whole and considers

its fit with each piece. Each cycle provides an opportunity for interpretation and reinterpretation (Wilcke, 2002). The process immerses the researcher in the data, enabling a clearer understanding of tacit meanings within the narrative. These tacit meanings emerge as themes interpreted by the researcher as essential to the phenomenon—an “insider’s view” of the phenomenon—promoting a deeper understanding of the experience of the phenomenon studied, of *being* in the world.

Using the word “understanding” related to an insider’s view may be problematic based on Heidegger’s conceptualization of the word. “[Understanding] is not a special capacity or gift for feeling into the situation of another person, nor is it the power to grasp the meaning of some ‘expression of life’ on a deeper level” (Palmer, 1969, p. 131). Instead, Heidegger viewed understanding as something far more personal; it is inextricably tied to how one *is* in the world, the taken-for-granted ways one navigates everyday situations (Palmer, 1969; Plager, 1994). Grondin (1994) defines Heidegger’s concept of understanding as “a knowing one’s way around that is undergirded by care” (p. 94). One cannot grasp a phenomenon outside of one’s own taken-for-granted understanding of the world. A researcher’s description of any experience or phenomenon will always be filtered through that researcher’s preconceptions, his personal lens or world view. Heidegger alluded to this personal lens when he stated that “the meaning of phenomenological description as a method lies in interpretation” (Heidegger, 1927/2008, p. 61). Simply by *being* we are about the business of interpreting the world around us. A researcher’s description of a phenomenon is simply an interpretation that may cultivate or extend an understanding (Grondin, 1994). Scholars cannot interpret a phenomenon—make meaning—without using a lens formed through their own experience.

To study the lived-experience of educators working with under-prepared students, the research followed Smith, Flowers, and Larkin's (2009) Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) process outlined in the following six steps. A Heideggerian approach to IPA was taken. Any adaptation to Smith et al.'s approach to maintain a Heideggerian stance is noted within respective steps.

1. Reading and rereading: The first step entailed reading and re-reading the first transcript and comparing it with the audio recording of that interview. The researcher immersed himself in the participant's experience and developed an overarching understanding of the interview as a whole (Smith et al., 2009). Familiarizing himself with the contextual elements of the interview included uncovering conversational patterns, e.g., movement from general ideas to specific details, the overall arc of the interview, etc. This process developed a high-level view of the interview's flow and of the interactions between the researcher and participant. Initial engagement with the data often produced a flood of ideas for the researcher, so the researcher briefly recorded those ideas to revisit later. "Parking" initial ideas in the research notes helped reduce distraction and helped the researcher re-focus on the participant's narrative.
2. Initial noting: This step offered a more detailed exploration of the participant's narrative. The researcher conducted an open-ended textual analysis, writing comments throughout the transcript on any words, phrases, ideas, patterns, or details that emerge. Initial noting was *not* intended to organize ideas, but rather to uncover possible elements for further inquiry. Smith, et al. (2009) offer three categorical

examples of comments that might be used during initial noting: descriptive comments, linguistic comments, and conceptual comments.

- a. Descriptive comments highlight the face-value content of the transcript—the words, phrases, or ideas that are fundamental to the participant’s narrative.
- b. Linguistic comments focus on the way in which content is presented—the presence of pauses, metaphors, sarcasm, laughter, repetition, slang, etc.
- c. Conceptual comments allow the researcher to expand ideas beyond the face-value content and explore underlying or connective ideas. These comments point to potentially important elements of the participant’s experience for the researcher to assess in more depth.

3. Developing emergent themes: The researcher began to organize ideas as they emerged from the data set, which included both the participant’s narrative and the researcher’s notes from the previous two steps. The researcher’s notes were organized into provisional themes that represent essential, underlying ideas—the imbedded meaning—found in parts of the interview (Smith et al., 2009). In this step, the researcher’s comments momentarily took prominence as emphasis was given to the researcher’s interpretation of the participant’s experience. This step also momentarily moved the researcher toward pieces of the interview rather than the whole. However, this focus on the pieces was tied to what was learned through analysis of the whole. Later, in keeping with the forward spiral of the hermeneutic circle, the researcher brought these pieces back to the whole for contextualized analysis.

4. Searching for connections across emergent themes: In this step, the researcher mapped the themes identified in step three and created a structure that highlighted the most relevant or noteworthy experiences in the participant's narrative (Smith et al., 2009). Related themes were grouped together. Grouped themes may have pointed to a new, overarching theme, i.e., abstraction, or one theme in the group may have emerged as an overarching theme under which related themes were collected, i.e., subsumption. Some initial themes may have been discarded as the researcher refined his interpretation of the most salient elements of the participant's experience. The researcher followed Smith, et al.'s (2009) recommendation to collect transcript excerpts that helped shape each overarching theme to evaluate the available support for each theme, and, later, to present these excerpts in the research results to allow others to evaluate the researcher's interpretations of participant experiences. These excerpts can be found throughout the Results section below. Throughout stage four of analysis, the researcher documented comments and emerging ideas in the research notes.
5. Moving to the next case: The researcher moved to the next participant narrative and analyzed the next case by repeating steps one through four above. "Here it is important to treat the next case on its own terms, to do justice to its own individuality" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 100). Smith et al. further suggest that the researcher bracket preconceived ideas that developed from the analysis of previous cases. However, bracketing is philosophically incongruent with a Heideggerian approach to IPA (Laverty, 2003; Pascal, 2010; Wilcke, 2002). Smith et al. more closely follow a Husserlian approach to IPA and suggest that documenting

perceptions before analyzing narrative increases the researcher's objectivity. A Heideggerian approach considers documenting preconceptions as an act of transparency. Taking this approach, the researcher followed Smith et al.'s (2009) suggestions to document in writing preconceptions and emergent ideas, but did so to expose those ideas to critical evaluation rather than assuming that those ideas would become objectively separate from the analysis and interpretation of data.

6. Looking for patterns across cases: In the final step, the researcher mapped the most salient themes as they emerged across all of the participants' stories. Themes were examined for their fit with the whole data set, and conversely, the whole data set was examined for ways it might have highlighted or reshaped the initial themes. As in step four, themes might have been elevated to an overarching status under which other themes were grouped, while other themes might have been discarded. In this phase of analysis, the researcher looked for common experiences and meanings across the data as well as unique experiences or meanings that, although exceptional, were interpreted as integral to the phenomenon. Again, participant statements used by the researcher to interpret predominant themes were included as support within the results and offered as a means for others to critically examine the researcher's interpretations. The final structure, including predominant themes and supportive participant statements, is offered below as the research results. The researcher followed Smith et al.'s (2009) suggestion that the researcher create a visual representation of the thematic structure (Appendix E).

Rigor: Establishing Trustworthiness

Rather than attempting to represent meaning correctly, interpretive phenomenology seeks to uncover the significance of a phenomenon through trustworthy interpretation (Leonard, 1994; Plager, 1994). This trustworthy interpretation, then, is the basis for perceiving and approaching phenomena in new, more holistic ways.

Establishing trustworthiness is the topic of debate among scholars. Padgett (2008) suggests six methods that contribute to trustworthiness in qualitative research, in general, including triangulation, prolonged engagement, peer debriefing, member checking, negative case analysis, and an audit trail. Barusch, Gringeri, and George (2011) add reflexivity and thick description to the list of strategies. Rolfe (2006), on the other hand, argues that there is no appropriate, predetermined criteria for evaluating rigor in qualitative inquiry. However, he suggests that research reports “should include a reflexive research diary” (p. 304), a practice akin to both an audit trail and reflexivity. Although researchers conceptualize rigor differently, the literature supports making the research process explicit, inviting critical evaluation, and uncovering participant experiences in their own words. These actions establish trustworthiness that affirms an IPA’s ability to inform practice.

At least two strategies for rigor should be used in qualitative research to help establish trustworthiness (Barusch et al., 2011). Three strategies were used with the current research: reflexivity, an audit trail, and negative case analysis. Reflexivity is the explicit self-exploration and presentation of the researcher’s underlying assumptions ascribed to various elements of the research. In their study of 100 qualitative research articles from 27 social work journals, Barusch et al. (2011) found that 86% of the articles

omitted reflexivity. Based on this finding and “the acknowledged subjectivity of qualitative methods and the importance of the researcher’s lens” (p. 17), Barusch et al. advocated for social work researchers to use reflexivity in qualitative research. For the current study, the researcher situated himself within the research phenomenon in writing prior to conducting research, and then documented his ideas and responses to the research process and data as described in data analysis (Barusch et al., 2011; Pascal, 2010; Sin, 2010).

An audit trail was the second strategy the researcher used for rigor. An audit trail documents the research process and provides research data in support of analysis (Barusch et al., 2011; Yardley, 2000). Providing access to the research process and data makes the researcher’s methods explicit, and allows stakeholders to critique the fit of the research findings with the research methods and data. The researcher documented ideas, including analysis codes and iterations of figures illustrating the developing structure, in research notes as described in the data analysis above. Samples of analysis codes used in evolving thematic structures are provided in Appendix F. Research data—excerpts of participant statements—are provided throughout the results section.

As a third strategy, the researcher conducted negative case analysis, or an assessment of a participant’s experience that seemed unique, that did not easily fit within emerging themes, or that diverged from the dominant experiences expressed by other participants (Barusch et al., 2011; Yardley, 2000). These divergent narratives served as a critical lens for assessing the researcher’s interpretation of dominant themes. Although the divergent narrative may have emerged from the data as a minority narrative, the researcher may also have interpreted the concept as significant to the overall structure of

phenomenon. The researcher may also have re-interpreted dominant themes after considering the unique or divergent case (Barusch et al., 2011; Yardley, 2000).

An example of negative case analysis in the current research emerged from one participant's comments about her reluctance to discuss her work with under-prepared students with her colleagues. Until reading and analyzing Regina's narrative, the researcher had interpreted a tentative theme of collegial support which focused on the helpful experience of commiserating with colleagues. However, Regina described a disinterest in sharing her experience with her colleagues because of the "scrutiny" and "controversy" that her sharing seemed to invite. Based on analysis of Regina's narrative, the researcher adapted his interpretation of collegial support to a theme of understanding one's role through interaction with colleagues. This subsequent theme was not dependent on a positive or negative quality ascribed to those interactions. The collegial theme and more detailed excerpts from Regina's interview are included in the results section below for use in evaluating the researcher's interpretation, but the researcher's analysis of Regina's divergent experience and subsequent re-interpretation of the collegial theme provides an example of negative case analysis used to promote a trustworthy interpretation.

Ethical Considerations

This study was approved for exempt status by the Indiana University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The research met the criteria for exempt status as there were no anticipated risks beyond the experiences of everyday life for participants. Additionally, the research adhered to the ethical principles associated with research with human subjects, including respect for individuals and their autonomy, the maximization of

benefit and the minimization of possible risks, and the equal distribution of benefits and possible risks among participants.

In addition to IRB approval, professional ethics obligate social workers to consciously and transparently protect human beings who participate in research, with heightened attention given to historically marginalized individuals. In the context of this research, marginalized individuals do not include social work faculty members, but ethical considerations remain. The National Association of Social Workers' (2007) Code of Ethics holds social work researchers accountable for treating colleagues with respect, considering potential ethical issues, consulting appropriate institutional review boards, and ensuring informed consent. Glesne (2006), Padgett (2008), and Pascal (2010) recommend that qualitative researchers consider the ethical implications of one or more of the following: professional standards, informed consent, dual relationships, confidentiality, cultural considerations, unintended consequences, and moral ambiguity. From these guidelines, three ethical considerations applied to interviewing social work faculty members: informed consent, dual-relationships, and confidentiality.

Informed consent is a process by which participants get to know the researcher and become aware of a study's purpose, methods, and consequences, especially potential risks or benefits to participants. Shaw (2008) believes that informed consent is especially complex in qualitative inquiry. When research is conducted through conversation, participants may perceive the conversation as informal, and informality may result in participants inadvertently sharing details they otherwise would not share. At the moment of initial consent, participants may not consider this as a risk. Shaw (2008) also suggests that informed consent implies researcher-foreknowledge of potential consequences,

which is incongruent with qualitative inquiry's potential to diverge into unforeseen topics. Although Shaw's arguments reflect notable concerns in qualitative inquiry, directly presenting these possible consequences to participants should provide sufficient information for social work educators to make informed decisions about participation. Interviews were conducted only with participants who reviewed the informed consent document (Appendix D) and verbally agreed. A signed informed consent was not required as the research was designated as exempt by the Indiana University Institutional Review Board. The researcher also provided opportunities for participants to clarify any questions or concerns they had about the current study.

Dual relationships raise the potential for faculty members to provide more information than they intend (Glesne, 2006). The researcher may have been viewed as a colleague or future colleague, as he taught in an undergraduate social work program and currently was pursuing a doctoral social work degree. It is unclear if faculty participants would share information with a colleague that they would not share with a researcher, but the potential existed for unintended exploitation, or what Glesne (2006) describes as a case of "friendship or friendliness" (p. 137) that may lead to privileged information. For most, if not all participants, unfamiliarity with the researcher reduced the likelihood of a collegial "friendship," and minimized the ethical concern. A more likely dual-relationship scenario might have entailed the researcher identifying potential faculty participants who had worked directly with the researcher in other ways. However, none of the study participants had previously worked directly with the researcher, and faculty members directly responsible for evaluating the researcher's work for degree completion were not eligible for participation.

Confidentiality surfaced as a final ethical consideration. Dual relationships, as mentioned above, could have led to ethical concerns if participants shared unintended information, or information that was especially personal or intimate. Revealing intimate information was not an immediate concern. An anticipated challenge with this study was dealing with information that may have identified the faculty participant within a well-connected community (Glesne, 2006; Padgett, 2008). Although the community of social work faculty members is large in number, many instructors are well-known within the community, especially long-term, outspoken, or highly published faculty members. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) seeks to uncover details inherent to an experience, not necessarily details about identity. However, if participants would have shared details of their experiences that connect them with their school, region, or practice specialty, other members of the community might have been able to guess participants' identities. Sorting experiential details and identity details was carefully considered, and priority was given to maintaining participant confidentiality. All participants' names were changed along with any information that might have readily revealed identity, such as the names of schools or universities, cities or regions, or exceptional professional interests or associations.

Chapter IV: Results

This chapter presents the results of the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) of the research data. Data analysis focused on the primary research question: “How do social work educators make sense of the experience of working with under-prepared students?” The primary concepts imbedded in the research question included: understanding the role or “work” of social work faculty members and how this work becomes meaningful in context with under-prepared students. These concepts formed the initial interview questions. Each participant was asked, “Tell me a story about working with an under-prepared student that you feel best captures that experience for you” and “As a social work educator, how do you understand your role working with under-prepared students?” These questions were intended to uncover the most meaningful aspects of the experience for each participant and the fundamental practices associated with the phenomenon of social work educators working with under-prepared students.

Participants’ experiences included working with individual under-prepared students and working with groups of students who may be categorically described as under-prepared students. For example, a group of students may share similar experiences due to racial or ethnic background or economic circumstances that may have limited their access to educational resources. This study included both individual and group experiences in the overall phenomenon of “working with under-prepared students.” However, participants’ tone changed depending on whether they were discussing an individual student or a group of students. Discussions about individual students were weightier and more meaningful than discussions about working with groups of students. This “weightiness” showed up in interviews as focused attention on experiences with

individual students, the recollection of details about individual students, and as greater concern about the appropriateness of decisions made and the effect those decisions might have on the lives of individual students. The weightier tone did not present itself as a theme to the overall experience of working with under-prepared students, but rather as a contextual element that wove itself through several themes. Although this tonal quality is not presented as a result, it is explored within the presentation of results that follow, especially the themes of recalling compelling moments and demonstrating care in and out of the classroom.

Following Barusch et al.'s (2011) urging for social work researchers to use reflexivity in qualitative research and following Basnett and Sheffield's (2010) example of incorporating reflexivity into IPA results, this chapter begins with a brief reflexivity section where the current author offers a few personal experiences related to working with under-prepared students. Results of the IPA are then presented as four themes—groupings of fundamental, everyday experiential elements that undergird the phenomenon. Themes include understanding under-preparation as social injustice, questioning what it means to be a social work educator, recalling compelling moments, and demonstrating care in and out of the classroom. These themes are not mutually exclusive, and some of the ways in which the themes overlap are discussed throughout the presentation of results. Themes are also presented in no particular order, and no theme was given prominence over another. These four themes reveal the most salient taken-for-granted experiences of social work educators who are working with under-prepared students.

Reflexivity

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) attempts to create transparency in the relationship between the researcher and the phenomenon being researched (Smith et al., 2009). Reflexivity, an explicit self-exploration and presentation of the researcher's underlying personal experiences and perspectives related to the study, helps to create transparency (Sin, 2010). A Heideggerian approach to IPA recognizes that these underlying perspectives cannot be removed from the research process, and so are made explicit and are included in the research process (Laverty, 2003; Pascal, 2010; Wilcke, 2002). Adhering to this approach, the experiences below are presented in writing as one way to establish rigor for the current study (Barusch et al., 2011; Pascal, 2010; Sin, 2010). These experiences are presented in first-person narrative as they are part of the author's personal history with the phenomenon under study, and they helped to create the lens through which he analyzed the research data.

I am a Caucasian-American gay male in my forties and, although I was raised in a lower social-economic environment, I consider my current experience to be a middle socio-economic status lifestyle. I have a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree and a Master of Social Work (MSW) degree, and I am currently a PhD candidate in Social Work studying at a large research university in the mid-west United States. I was the first in my family to attend and graduate from college. As a first-generation college student, I was intrigued by the use of "first-generation students" as a proxy for under-prepared students. My personal experience did not reflect the literature available on first-generation students as I tended to excel in academic settings and my parents were actively supportive of my educational goals. The disparity between my personal

experience and the literature on first-generation students, in part, prompted me to identify a broader definition of “under-prepared student” as I was most interested in understanding the context of students who struggled in academic settings regardless of their first-generation status.

Reading Levin’s (2007) *Nontraditional students and community colleges: The conflict of justice and neoliberalism* inspired my interest in under-prepared students in social work programs. Levin (2007) indicated that the mission of community colleges in the United States was rooted in social justice—that community colleges were created to provide educational opportunities and the resulting benefits to individuals who otherwise would not be able to access higher education. As I read about community colleges fostering social justice through education, I began to wonder about the social justice implications for students of social work—how pursuing an undergraduate degree in social work might (or should?) foster social justice for the students, themselves. I also began to question social work education’s role in advantaging or disadvantaging under-prepared students while they pursue a BSW. Is it feasible to foster social justice for an under-prepared student while preparing that same student with competencies for professional practice with future clients? Might social work education model competencies for students by viewing education as a social work intervention that promotes social and economic justice for under-prepared students? The current study seeks to begin to answer these types of questions.

I understood that asking if social work education could be an “intervention” for social justice suggested a client-like view of students by me. I do not view students as clients, but I do believe working with students can be an analogous experience to

working with traditional social work clients. I also believe that social justice occurs in the day-to-day activities that make up my every-day experience with everyone I encounter, student or not, client or not. These views also contributed to my interest in the day-to-day work of social work educators who work with under-prepared students.

In addition to my personal experience as a student and my questions about the social justice implications for social work students, my experience as an adjunct faculty member and visiting lecturer teaching BSW and MSW courses influenced my perceptions of under-prepared students and what it is like to work with them. While teaching both introductory and capstone BSW courses, I worked with students who consistently struggled to understand my expectations and how to navigate the day-to-day interactions that I believed to be common to college-level classrooms, assignments, and programs. Although I felt confident that I provided both the students and myself with enough guidance to evaluate progress through a course, individual students' circumstances always emerged that did not quite fit with the guidance, and I was often faced with an ethical dilemma of sorts—making a decision between what seemed to be competing responsibilities.

I recall a conversation I had with a student in my Introduction to Social Work course after she had missed the previous class. She had already missed several classes and her work seemed to suffer for it—she missed turning in assignments or, when she submitted her work, it did not meet course expectations nor make use of resources provided in course materials and in class. Also, when I had previously talked with her about missing classes or about the quality of her work, I perceived her as becoming defensive—my follow up with her seemed to incite bitterness in her responses. When I

told her that I noticed she was absent from the previous class and asked if she was alright, she told me that she had to finish an assignment that was due for another course and had skipped my class to do so. I told her that, although I understood that the need to complete an assignment can feel like an emergency, it was not an appropriate reason for missing my class. She responded by saying, “Well, it’s good enough for me.” I found myself at a loss for words. I was offended by her lack of respect for me, but also embarrassed by my own uncertainty about how to respond to the situation.

I was an inexperienced educator, and although I had spent a lot of time in planning and preparing for my courses, that preparation often fell short in context with individual students. I found myself questioning how strict or supportive, or how formal or informal I should be with students. Although I had a couple of faculty mentors who willingly helped me sort through some of the challenging interactions I had with students, the volume of students who seemed to struggle and with whom I was uncertain of how to respond felt daunting. While talking with a mentor about another student who was struggling—the student invested time and effort into her work, but was unable to demonstrate basic competency of the material—my mentor asked me if I would want this student as a professional colleague working with clients. I said, “No.” While the answer to that question was clear to me, I also understood some of that student’s experience, and I had invested a lot of time and effort into working with that student. Despite writing what I thought were clear and detailed expectations in my syllabi, determining the line between supporting a student and protecting the profession was sometimes clouded for me. These experiences prompted me to ask how other social work educators do this work, and more so, how they endure in this work.

Understanding Under-Preparation as Social Injustice

Perceiving under-preparation as social injustice—a result of historic inequities—was one theme that consistently presented itself as helping participants make sense of their work with students. Participants tended to view students within the context of the students’ stated or perceived histories. When describing their work with specific students, participants included descriptions of the challenging or inequitable pre-college experiences that those students had shared with participants. When discussing under-prepared students in general, participants included the potential or likely challenges that students experienced, such as poverty, under-resourced schools, conflicted families-of-origin, being the first family member to attend college, etc. Participants viewed these challenging or inequitable experiences as contributing to the students’ under-preparation. Although participants clearly communicated that they expected under-prepared students to “do their part”—to take responsibility for the work necessary to overcome historical challenges—participants also communicated perceptions that students approached college using their current understandings, or pre-understandings, of how to navigate their worlds—students used a taken-for-granted way of making sense of everyday situations (Palmer, 1969; Plager, 1994).

Rather than discussing social injustices simply as incongruent with social work principles or as requiring an obligatory professional response, participants suggested that their perceptions of students’ histories flowed from an underlying way of being in the world. Just as students possessed a pre-understanding of how to make sense of their world, research participants had a pre-understanding, too, that under-preparation was a manifestation of historical social injustices. This type of understanding—under-

preparation as social injustice—gave meaning to the role participants adopted with students. An underlying principle of intervening in injustice—seeing one’s self as a change agent called to enact justice—compelled participants to consider how their work with students might foster social justice, especially for those students who were perceived as under-prepared due to historic inequities. Although participants expressed a desire to support all students, they understood their role with under-prepared students differently from their role with well-prepared students, and specifically based this difference on the perception that under-preparation represented social injustice.

While describing extra time spent with one student outside of the classroom, Christine suggested that under-preparation is a larger, social issue without calling it social injustice. She summarized her experiences with one student and then generalized that experience to other under-prepared students as follows:

I watched her throughout the time and worked with her [until] she finally graduated from our program. She did have the desire to do better and to get better. She did work at trying to improve her skills. I don’t know how to say this gracefully—I don’t know if there is a graceful way to say it—but she had so many deficits, so many things, both in math and in written skills, that she didn’t [know]. Basic things that I think students should have like, [in] maybe fourth grade, she was still working on. She would ask questions like, how many sentences have to be in a paragraph? Well it depends on what you’re talking about, is what I would say. She would say, but if you tell me how many I’m supposed to have, that’s what I’ll get for you. It was like she had never understood about schematics, about theme sentences, and it took well over a semester before I thought she was writing paragraphs that at least held together thematically, that at least carried a thought through. You see the same things over and over again, as far as the deficits, and I can’t believe that it’s just personal lack of responsibility that’s the reason for this ongoing problem with writing, the ongoing problems with what I consider basic knowledge.

Christine’s last comment hinted at a view of everyday situations that included the possibility of social and systemic influences on under-preparation—that when students

are under-prepared, it is likely more than a simple refusal by one individual to take personal responsibility. Another social work educator, Carmen, expanded on the idea of systemic influences—historic inequities—that contribute to under-preparation. Carmen said:

And I must say I find myself just getting very angry that students have been cheated in their education up to this point. That's just not fair, you know. It's not fair that they grew up in neighborhoods where there wasn't an investment in the public schools. It's not fair that they may have come from families where there was a real struggle, and so they went to school hungry a lot. I mean, how can you learn when what you're focused on is, I really need something to eat!? You know, so I find myself getting angry, not at the students, but at the structures that seem to be built to ensure that they fail, and to me that's just not fair.

Like Carmen, Sheryl said, “It’s not fair.” She elaborated:

I was always committed to doing my best to work with students so that they could come up to the standard that they needed to be at, but it gets harder and harder when you have so many of them. My experience here at this university now, my new university, is a bit different. The kids, even though they’re from perhaps under-resourced schools, they’re still much better prepared than the kids [from the area around my previous university], which really points out the inequality issue to me. It really depends on where you grow up. It really depends on where you go to school in terms of states—in terms of parts of states, even—and it’s just not fair. Every kid in this country deserves a good education! And I think poverty and family issues... there are all kinds of issues that go into this... but it’s just not fair that kids don’t all have the same, equal shot. That’s what stands out for me. That’s my social worker in me saying, Wow, this really isn’t fair!

Although Christine, Carmen, and Sheryl do not use terms such as “social injustice” or “historic inequities,” their comments begin to reveal ways of thinking in which under-preparation does not occur in isolation, and perceptions that include the students’ histories and social contexts as contributions to their under-preparation.

Other participants linked this perception of under-preparation specifically to the ways in which social workers create meaning in a social or communal context. Sheryl’s comments provided evidence of a socially constructed understanding of under-

preparation among social workers. Social construction is the development of knowledge or meaning that occurs through human interaction (Crotty, 1998), such as collegial discussions, and socially constructed language allows individuals to classify experiences in ways that have meaning for the individual as well as for her colleagues (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In Sheryl's comments below, she discussed one of her first experiences with under-prepared students and how discussing that experience with another social work educator helped her form her understanding of under-preparation.

She said:

[I had] this cadre of students in the back of the class that were [sic] doing nothing but talking, and not paying attention—disrupting the rest of the class. I got angry that they were being so disrespectful, not only to me, but to the rest of the class. And in my head, I thought to myself, I am teaching in college. I shouldn't have to deal with this behavior! And I remember going back to my office one particular day for some reason ... it was just awful. I remember getting more and more frustrated, and trying my best to maintain some sort of control of the class, which I don't usually have trouble with. [I remember] going back to my office and just being so frustrated. I remember slamming my books down on my desk and just sitting there shaking my head. And one of my colleagues was passing by, and she said, What's up? And I said, Oh, this group of students . . . And she said, Oh, yes, this cohort—they're quite something aren't they? And we had this conversation. So what began as an "I don't know what to do with these students," really ended up as almost an assessment of the reasons that these kids were so under-prepared. And we got into impoverished communities, impoverished schools, and why these kids really weren't getting what they were supposed to be getting in school. We got into inequality of education. So when you start to process it ... particularly [with] another social worker, you can bounce ideas off of each other. We were able to view that [experience] in such a way as to really begin to understand this as a social work, almost social-justice issue—that these kids were under-prepared because of where they came [from] in life, and the kinds of families they grew up in, the kinds of communities they came from, which were... most of our kids were very, very poor growing up.

At first, Sheryl perceives the students' behavior as disruptive, disrespectful, and inappropriate for a college classroom. Her frustration and anger suggest that she initially

believed that these students should have known what behavior was appropriate for the classroom, and their behavior was an affront to the social norms of higher education. Then, as she processes that experience with a colleague, the meaning she interprets shifts to a perception of their behavior as evidence of historical experiences that ill-prepared the students for following the norms of higher education. This shift in Sheryl's perception of under-preparation reflects a social construction—meaning that is created through interactions with colleagues, and specifically among social work educators. Later in our conversation, Sheryl also distinguished her perception of under-preparation from the perceptions of colleagues in different fields. She said:

I think, for me, what might get at this in a different way [is]... in talking with some of my colleagues in other departments, and I'm also married to a professor of [another discipline]... I don't think that they got the social justice issue of under-prepared the way that we do in social work. I think that we immediately—once we recognized what the issue was—I think we immediately went to Okay, this is a social justice issue because X, Y and Z. They're from really poor families. They're living in poor communities, etc.

When another participant, Gayle, was asked about what it meant to be a social work educator, she also made a distinction between her perceptions and the potential perceptions of non-social work colleagues. She explained:

Well, I mean... it means, like any educator, I have a passion about my profession and I'm trying to prepare students to hopefully share that passion, but also to go out and do justice to the profession. So, you know, I'm a professor just like any other professor. I have a subject I'm good at. I have a subject I know. I think the difference is that I'm more acutely aware of the social environment and the role that that plays in behavior, including learning.

...I think a lot of my colleagues [who are not social work educators], if they thought about theoretically where they come from, they're [using] social learning theory, cognitive models, and... [As] a social work educator, I [can use] those fine, but I can't escape my systems and environmental theory influences. So it's never a matter to me of just

saying, Oh, just go learn this. Just study harder. It's not...there's always this... you know what's going on in [the students'] environment that's also impacting their learning.

Sheryl and Gayle's comments suggest that they believe that their world view, which influences their understanding of their role with students, is at least partially shared by other social work educators. Social work educators may see a set of experiences in a student's history and interpret that set of experiences as an issue of social justice (or injustice). This set of experiences may then be interpreted as the context for under-preparation, where under-preparation does not occur in isolation, but rather is the culmination of life experiences.

Nora's comments on a social work perception of under-preparation included how this perception of under-preparation might differentiate her roles with well-prepared and under-prepared students. Nora said:

I see myself as a social worker first—like, I'm 80% social worker and 20% educator—so it is a joy and responsibility to support students in general, because they have worth and dignity, and it's a social justice issue to be able to support students who have had a lot of bad breaks and haven't had adequate... sometimes food or shelter or supervision or support, and an education.

She continued:

So I see it as a social justice issue, and if I were preparing students who all came from... who we're well prepared—and we have some of those students, too—I like [working with them], to support them and to challenge them. We really work at challenging *everybody* wherever they're at, to challenge them and to move them through, and help them through their careers, and have them think through things, and figure out their own values and all that. That's a joy and that's also definitely consistent in part of my role as a social worker. But, [with] the students who are under-prepared, it feels like it's a heavier responsibility and it's even more consistent with my responsibilities as a social worker. It's more important to support those students.

Later in our conversation, Nora re-emphasized the link between being a social worker and her perceptions of students, and what these perceptions might mean for her role with under-prepared students:

Well, part of our job as a social worker is social justice and giving people opportunities, and allowing people to develop their capabilities, and... it's such a big subset of our society that is stopped from doing that because they're not getting enough food and enough love, because their parents aren't around or because they're working or they're so stressed, and then the education part... So kids get to be 18 and they just haven't... [there's] no way they can join a middle class life or go to college because they don't have ... they're just missing so many pieces.

So, if we, in the time that they are [here], can help them kind of make up some of those deficits, we can live out that social work core value of social justice of allowing the students, these people who have just been through so many things in their life... to become a professional and to be utilizing their abilities, and making contributions to society.

And students that have different challenges and are under-prepared academically, we have a bigger commitment to them as part of our mission statement, to be accessible to a diversity of students... But we love it. When... sometimes we talk about [that] we should have higher standards... we think, Well, we don't want them too much higher because then we might miss ... block out some of these students that end up doing really well.

Nora's comments help to clarify the difference between fulfilling a professional commitment to develop and nurture future, competent practitioners—what she might do with any student—and fulfilling an additional commitment to fostering social justice with under-prepared students. She sees her role with under-prepared students as “more important” and “more consistent” with her responsibilities as a social worker. This view of her role reflects her conceptualization of under-preparation as a result of historic injustice, and this understanding shows up in the importance—the meaning—that she places on her work with under-prepared students.

Although participants' perception was that under-preparation was a manifestation of general historic social injustices, participants' comments often focused specifically on educational inequities. Academic under-performance was perceived as evidence of educational inequalities experienced by the student. In one of her previous comments, Christine described a student who had difficulty writing and then refers to this educational inequity when she said that the "...basic things that I think students should have like maybe [in] fourth grade, [the student] was still working on." Carmen described a similar situation with a student. Like Christine, as Carmen discusses her experience with the student, she repeatedly refers to her perception that the educational system had failed the student:

And so what I did with her, when it became very obvious from her writing that—and, again... she had already taken two writing courses, so I don't really quite understand how people come to their junior year having taken other courses that required writing and they still can't write clearly. Anyway, and so I, for whatever reason, I decided that year that I really wanted to invest in her, and that I saw potential there. And I was really just kind of angry that nobody helped her along the way, that... you know, here was somebody who was motivated, but nobody had really helped her develop the skill. And writing, I think, is a skill that can be developed; it's not outside of people's purview unless you have some really significant limitations.

Carmen then described a process of guiding the student through writing several papers, spending time with the student outside of class to help the student build her writing skills. Carmen concluded with:

And then she would send me a draft and I would give her some feedback... Well, this is confusing. You need to fix this. I wasn't editing, I was just pointing out where there were problems, and worked with her like that—less so the second semester, more so the first semester—to help her begin to develop the skills that somebody should have taught her a long time ago. I don't understand, you know? It makes me crazy when I think about the failures of our educational system.

Gayle recounted a similar story. While working with a student on developing writing skills, Gayle was surprised to hear that no one had previously discussed writing skills with the student. She said:

But I remember, [and] this sticks with me, one time this young woman said to me, You know that nobody has ever told me what about my grammar was poor. They always just say, "Fix your grammar." And we actually sat down, and I talked with her about verb tenses... and we read her papers back and forth a couple of times. And when she said, nobody has ever told me what specifically they were frustrated with [about] my writing, I was just like, you're kidding me!

Participants perceived under-developed academic skills, such as poor writing skills, as evidence of past educational inequities rather than a personal failure by the student, or an evasion of personal responsibility by the student.

Perceiving under-preparation as a social or educational injustice is important to the experience of working with under-prepared students in the way it influences participants' everyday interactions with these students. Interactions with under-prepared students, while addressing a practical need of building skill, took on an ethical charge; the role became a way to fulfill a commitment to fostering justice. Julian discusses this ethical charge when he describes students with whom he worked and his perception of their preparation. When asked what it was like for him to be faced with working with multiple students who were under-prepared, he said:

First is, it can be a little discouraging because, wow, they are really not ready. Also, I feel, I don't know exactly know the word, but maybe discouraged also that so many students have been passed along and they... it's just that they have been passed along and have been given a great disservice. I had a student last year and I had another student this year who [both] told me almost the exact same thing. They said, I thought I was a good writer until I met you. Part of me is like, "Man, that makes me feel like a heel!" But the thing that I'm so sad about is the fact that they didn't know, and that people had just passed them along, and had not taken the

time to talk with them and to give them feedback. That just really makes me really sad for them.

When asked to clarify what it would mean to him to “pass along” students, Julian replied:

In my view, from a core of ethics standpoint, that’s unethical. It would be lazy on my part. It would not be taking my job—my charge, my mission—very seriously. It would just... I would be really disappointed in myself if I did that, because it would be time for me to get out of this [work] if I got to the point to where I did that.

When asked, “What is it like for you?” and “What does it mean to you?” Julian’s responses seemed to entail an intuitive perception of injustice (other educators passing students along) and his sense of responsibility to act ethically toward students. He said, “I don’t want to be one of those people that just passes them along. I will not do that...,” which I interpreted as him perceiving his work as an opportunity to act ethically—to foster justice. Understanding under-preparation as a social injustice fundamentally changes the experience of working with under-prepared students. Participants instinctually responded to injustice with actions intended to promote justice; their work with under-prepared students reflected attempts to compensate for historical injustice experienced by students.

Not only does the perception of under-preparation as social injustice influence the ways in which social work educators work with students, but it also compels educators to question how they might unintentionally contribute to injustice, further disadvantaging under-prepared students. Educators might use the perception that under-preparation is an expression of injustice as justification for advancing a student through the program when the student has not met all of the criteria for advancement, and view allowing the student to advance as an act of justice. During his interview, Douglas discussed how educators’ perceptions of historic injustices toward students can fit and conflict with how they

understand their role. When asked if he would tell a story about working with a student who was under-prepared, he discussed a young woman who was taking a senior level course, but whose reading comprehension and writing skills did not meet his expectations for senior-level work. Douglas then recounted a conversation with the student when he told her about what he was seeing, what he thought she needed to work on -- how her writing was not where it needed to be, why her test scores were low, etc. He continued:

...It came as a shock to her because, the way she explained it... she said, For years I have been told that I'm running this race and that I'm doing okay in this race... Now I find, I thought I was logging all these miles and I really haven't been, meaning that people had been telling her that she's good, and that everything's okay, and that she's doing a good job and that... she had kind of confused hard work with quality product. She really blamed that on her professors before in saying that, I, if I wasn't doing well, they should have told me I wasn't doing well. I would have sought out additional resources to help me. But now here I am about to graduate and I feel really unprepared for what I'm about to get into.

But if I wanted to describe [my own experience], it would be frustrating, and frustrating in the sense that I felt that maybe her professors before—her gen. ed. professors—they should have told her what was going on. They should have been real with her, been authentic with her about the level of work that she was doing, because it puts you, when you're the professor that says, Hey, this is not where it should be, and [the student has previously] been told the whole time that it is, you kind of become the bad guy, if you will. Nobody else has told me this so why are you all of a sudden telling me this kind of thing? Fortunate enough for this student and myself, we had the relationship such that I could tell her that, and she also talked about people—she said, My other professors are too nice. So she talked about how niceness kind of ruined her. She didn't want somebody to be nice; she wanted them to be fair. She wanted to be assessed accordingly. Quite honestly, she thought it was because she was a woman of color and that people felt like, Oh I need to help this person along..., when in actuality, that's the very thing that you don't want to happen.

Douglas concluded our discussion by questioning his role and the role of other educators in educational inequity—a form of social injustice for students. He said:

The critical question is, I mean, of course it is about dealing with under-prepared or unprepared students, but I think the even bigger question is, What role do we have in contributing to them being unprepared? I think when you think about it like that you are like, “Oh!” It’s just kind of a different...the very thing we’re talking about being frustrated by is the very thing that we do. So we have to critically ask ourselves, what role do we play? What role does the academy play? What role does the institution play? That’s essentially what you’re talking about, in my opinion.

Douglas perceived under-preparation as a result of historic inequities. (In the excerpt above, the historic injustice was committed by well-intentioned educators.) Douglas also perceived his work with under-prepared students as a way to foster social justice by directly discussing and intervening in the under-prepared behaviors.

Theme summary. The interview data suggests that contextualizing under-preparation as an issue of social justice is instinctual for social work educators who work with under-prepared students—as a way of being in the world, social work educators recognize the historic and systemic influences on students and the ways in which these influences advantage or disadvantage students. This perception also serves as a way for participants to make sense of—make meaning from—their work with under-prepared students. The meaning or importance of the work flows from a perceived opportunity to foster justice in the face of injustice. Not only is meaning created by the potential advantaging of under-prepared students, but also from considering how one might avoid or reduce the potential for further injustice toward students.

Questioning What It Means To Be a Social Work Educator

Working with under-prepared students entails an implicit, continuous experience of questioning what it means to *be* a social work educator. During the initial phases of data analysis, between two to six different themes related to how social work educators

understand their role with under-prepared students were interpreted. At first, these themes seemed distinct, but later presented themselves as unified. The themes were divided into multiple groups, groups were then combined into more overarching themes, overarching themes were re-divided into new subgroups, and then subgroups were recombined into new overarching themes. Through this process the data revealed intersecting, overlapping, and often convoluted understandings of what it meant to work with under-prepared students, and more specifically, what it meant to *be* a social work educator in the midst of the work. Finally, after reviewing the analysis and the analysis process, these complexities were interpreted as an unspoken experience of creating and recreating the meaning of *being* a social work educator in the context of working with under-prepared students. This underlying experience is reflected in three dimensions: the role dimension, the responsibility dimension, and the collegial dimension. Together, these three dimensions reflect an experience of self-understanding that is implicit to working with under-prepared students.

Role dimension. The first dimension was the role dimension. This dimension reveals the complexity of balancing a commitment to protect the social work profession and future clients with a commitment to help under-prepared students compensate for previous injustices and access the socio-economic benefits associated with completing an undergraduate degree. Participants understood their roles with all students as an integration of these commitments, but they also understood that working with under-prepared students often brought these commitments into conflict. The recalled-experiences with specific students or groups of students quickly revealed how these co-commitments required participants to continuously evaluate and recreate their

understanding of what it meant to be a social work educator in a particular moment with a particular student. Although participants held these commitments in tension, they also moved within the role dimension by seemingly asking themselves, “In this moment, am I a gate keeper to the profession or am I a door opener for this student?” Participants’ answer to that question changed with each student, each classroom of students, and each cohort of students.

Participants discussed their door-opening role as one that supports all students, prepared or otherwise, in the students’ personal and professional development, but they also expressed a heightened responsiveness to under-prepared students in light of historic inequities. Julian’s description of his role with students, and how his role may accommodate under-preparation, demonstrates this door-opening commitment and the potential limits to this commitment. He said:

I can’t go back and clean everything up. I think... boy this is hard to express... let’s say the standard should be that all students come in at level five and they’re going to work towards level ten of being a social work student. But I get a student who comes in at level three. So should I go back and help them [sic] catch up and get [to] level four so that they can then be at five—what we kind of consider to be the standard for starting? Yeah, I think so... go back and do a little bit of cleanup. Like I said, is it my job to teach history? Not really, they should have gotten it in World History, but they didn’t. So if I can spend a few minutes and talk about apartheid, talk about military industrial complex to help catch them up, I will. I don’t necessarily, though, see my job as going back to level one and going all the way back and completely catching them up. They should be at a... have some of the prerequisites.

The other thing is... I try not to get too emotional about it. I mean this is my job, this is what I do, and students tend to think that they’re going to come into the classroom already knowing everything. Well, they wouldn’t be there if they already knew everything. So of course they are going to have deficits. I mean that’s my job, that’s what we’re here for.

Helping to make up for “deficits” experienced by any student is part of the job, but Julian also suggested that there may be student experiences that will limit his role as a door-opener who is attempting to develop future social work practitioners. The need for students to meet “some of the prerequisites” suggests that there is a standard that must be met during his initial work with students that may trigger Julian’s gate-keeper role.

Carmen suggested similar potential limiters. She said:

I think I'm... with all students, not just the under-prepared, I see my role as a guide and a mentor, that I'm available, you know, I try to make myself available to them. Try to help them see that I want to be supportive of them and that they can come to me. I'm not going to... I don't want to impose myself on them because I may be not the right person for a particular student. You know, maybe somebody else, maybe Bob, you know, would be a better mentor for a male student than I would be.

Although these comments initially focus on mentoring any student, Carmen continued by discussing how mentoring took on new meaning with under-prepared students. She said:

And I think for many of the students who are under-prepared that's what we need is... we need to invest in them and we need to... they need ... you know, maybe a mentor. That's one of the things that we do here on this campus is... if when a student's applied to the program and we, you know, somebody has had the student in an intro class, typically, and we have some sense of who they are, if for a whole variety of reasons we feel they need more than a once-a-semester advising appointment with the advisor we'll assign, [then] we'll say, Okay, who would be a good mentor among those of us who are fulltime, and let's have that person meet more regularly to provide support, to help locate resources, if we need to help locate resources? And that could be for a variety of reasons, but very often it's because we think that the student has promise, but is a bit under-prepared academically. And so we want to make sure that they have some support, because we think they'll be good social workers.

Carmen’s comments suggest that her role entails additional support for under-prepared students, but this support is offered in light of professional promise—that the student demonstrates the potential to become a “good social worker.” The consequences of both acting as door-opener and of acting as a gate-keeper are considered in context with each

student. This simultaneous consideration of both roles reflected a questioning of what it meant to be a social worker educator—what role one would play—in a particular context with a particular under-prepared student. An educator might lean toward opening doors that might lead to an otherwise inaccessible benefit for a student; or, an educator might lean toward closing a gate that leads to professional practice. Either way, the educator must determine which approach best fits with his or her understanding of their role as a social work educator working with that student given that particular student's assets and limitations.

Maggie used her understanding of her professional role with colleagues as a way to determine her role with students. Although her use of a collegial role as a model was different than the experiences discussed by other participants, her approach was still an attempt to understand and balance her gate-keeper and door-opener roles. When asked about the day-to-day experiences that made up her work with under-prepared students, she discussed her work with a student who struggled with his writing skills. She explained:

...I gave him opportunities to rewrite his papers because I thought, again, it's one thing to hand in a sloppy paper, [and] it's another thing to learn from your mistakes. And, again, in clinical practice, there are times where you may make a poor judgment or an incomplete diagnosis, but if you go to your supervisor and your supervisor gives you better information, [then] the next time you are better at what you do. So, I try to merit that as a professional social worker with my students, so that they can see that there is no shame in being where you are, but that doesn't mean you need to stay there. You don't need to be proud of where you are, if in fact you're not where you need to be.

Helping students develop writing skills is a door-opening activity. It advantages students—enables students to access and use opportunities for their personal and professional well-being. Like other study participants, however, this door-opening effort

was tempered. Later, Maggie shared that a caveat to her door-opening role is to protect or “advocate” for the profession:

So again, as in supervision, when you see someone who is younger in the field beginning to either have practices that are unhelpful or are missing some things in their understanding of client needs, then you address that. I think that that’s part of our job as well. We want to provide support, and we will go to bat [for students]. We will advocate for students, but we’re also advocates for the field itself—the profession. We’re deeply interested in graduating students that can not only graduate from our programs, but be exemplary professionals.

Maggie’s discussion of her role included both supporting under-prepared students and fulfilling her commitment to the social work profession. The underlying tension in Maggie’s comments suggested an ongoing questioning of what it means to be a social work educator—both gate-keeper and door-opener.

Some participants more explicitly discussed the tension between gate-keeper and door-opener. This tension seemed to be rooted in a perception that working with under-prepared students evokes an experience of working with clients in a traditional practice setting. Participants did not view students as clients, but recognized that the role participants took with students often mimicked a role they had taken with clients. Participants questioned the extent to which their role with students should mirror a role with a client, and seemingly asked themselves, “When does gate keeper trump door opener?”

When asked what it was like for her to work with under-prepared students, Regina began to tell a story about a particular student with whom she had worked. The student was the first in her family to go to school, was born in a country outside of the United States, had never taken an online course and was now required to take an online course with Regina, and eventually peppered Regina with questions about how to use the online

system and how to complete assignments. Regina said, “Little by little the translation, or at least my interpretation, ultimately was, ‘You’re going to need to spoon feed this to me.’” Without prompting, Regina’s story naturally transitioned into comments about her role with students. She said:

And I definitely get, I mean part of... part of being a social work faculty member is that you are ultimately aware of the context of your students. The fact that I feel sensitive to first generation students, that I feel sensitive to students of color, that I feel sensitive to issues around English as a second language, sometimes can be mind boggling when you have to make decisions about grading. And you make hard decisions around those kinds of things. We so profess understanding people in their contextual surroundings, but I am not sure that the decisions that you have to make in an academic setting (pause) ...that you are always able to take those contexts into consideration. We have a very spirited debate here at the school of social work about how to teach, evaluate, assess, put forth students into field work, etc., when we feel like they are academically weak.

Regina was asked to clarify what “mind boggling” meant related to understanding students’ context and making hard decisions. She responded:

Well, I think that the mind boggling part for me comes down to our relationships with students, and are students our “clients” quote, unquote, or are students our “students” in a more traditional sense of the word. I see that almost as a continuum, you know, like we might have relationships with students that are... some faculty members that are extremely boundaried (sic) and other people or faculty members might be way at the other end of the spectrum, which is really... my biases are going to come through here so, more along the lines of, they have made it this far—isn’t it our responsibility to kind of... I mean, I have one colleague, actually, who her refrain about under-prepared students is that, “College is the portal to the middle class. It’s not our place to cut them off from that.” And then somebody at the other extreme might say, “But they are not ready to be, they can’t be falsely elevated into [social work practice] because they could harm people.”

Regina’s comments speak to the tension expressed by participants around questioning the extent to which their educator role with students should mirror a social work practitioner role with clients—the extent to which they should attempt to open doors for students. As

Regina continued, she begins to reveal how she uses her co-commitments to construct her role with students:

I hold social work faculty member and social work practitioner side by side. And, I don't think I would necessarily be happy in the work that I did if I completely abandoned my professional background as a practitioner. Not that I want to be practitioner with my students—I don't at all. But it's just who I am—my background. I think if I went to the zoo, I'd see the animals in the context of their surroundings—it's just the air I breathe. And I am not sure that is as true for faculty members [when] that's not their professional background. I think once you grow up in this field and then you go on into academia, you can't cut off that part of yourself. So it's just a tension, I guess, and you know I find a lot in social work—the kind of principles that I apply—things like, I am not going to work harder than the student is. So that is something that I kind of applied—that principle which I used to say—I am not going to work harder than the client is. Or at least I am not going to work harder over time. I might know that I am going to work harder in the beginning of the relationship, and that's okay, but if that continues that would not be advantageous to the client. And I feel that as well with the student. So this idea somehow that the locust of control needs to... ultimately that the ball needs to be held by the student becomes, I think, essential.

Regina's comments exemplify the experiences of social work educators who hold their gate keeper and door opener roles in tension, an experience that undergirds the day-to-day experiences of working with under-prepared students.

Viewing under-prepared students as client-like seemed to give the role dimension it's weight and sometimes it gave urgency to the door-opening role, or it made the gatekeeper role difficult to adopt. Christine's comments suggested that she saw herself as a door opener whenever possible, in part because of the student-client parallel. She stated that she did not see her social work educator role as the same as a clinical practitioner role, but that those two roles often look similar. When asked what it meant to her to be a social work educator, she said:

It fuels me, so it's selfish in that also, that I saw that I was pretty good, or I think I'm pretty good at this. People came out of [our time together] with

increased knowledge and things that they could use. So, that's part of it, too. I don't believe, and I've heard some educators say that they see their teaching as their practice, and I don't really see it that way. But I do see that, part of what I signed up for when I signed for my social work license and said that I would abide by the code, is that we give something back. This is a way that I can give back and still eat.

She later expands upon her understanding of her role by saying:

[It's] hard, frustrating, challenging, fun, rewarding... its social work. I mean, I don't see it much different than how we approach our jobs. We work with people that had come to us in terrible places in their lives with multiple things going poorly and we don't run away from that. We don't say, "Well, golly gee, figure it out." We say, "Let's work with you, let's partner with you. What can I do that would help? What information do you need that I might have? What are your goals? What are your dreams?" I don't think it's much different than how we approach our practices. If you're a social worker, it's not by accident that the first core value is service, at least, it isn't to me. I love my code. I love that the... I love that it sets the bar so high, but isn't that what our first thing is—service?

Perceiving students as client-like fuels educators' adoption of a door-opening role. *Being* a social worker means *being* a door-opener, and being a social work educator means being a door-opener for under-prepared students. As educators attempt to define what it means to be a social work educator, the door-opening role emerges as an underlying element in the questioning process.

As often as a participant would express their desire to respond to students' historical inequities and open doors, he or she would also express how difficult the gate-keeping process became in light of those historical inequities. As mentioned previously, Douglas described his perception that other educators had allowed under-performing students to progress through course work without meeting the requisite standards. Now, these students were taking his courses and not meeting his standards. He described experiencing pressure in this situation that stemmed from his role as gate-keeper:

There is always a kind of... there is a pressure that you feel for knowing that this student is not prepared, but knowing that you have a duty to try to prepare the student while at the same time being accountable to the process. ...You want to do the best job you can, and nobody likes to give E's and F's. So that's pressure within itself, and there is an emotion that goes along with that. I feel bad when I have to assign a student a grade that they earn and it's not good. ...there is also a pressure of feeling or empathizing for this student being in this position and knowing that the education system played a role in that was just a bit challenging.

He was asked to tell more about this pressure. He responded by continuing a story about his experience with one student:

So, pressure in knowing that the very system that I am working in could be the reason that I'm having to deal with this problem. The pressure of knowing that again, in a school with social work, a lot of times [these students are] juniors and seniors. This lady was set to graduate in a very, in a couple months. ...So, it was literally two months before she was going to be graduating, and you have this student who has essentially a 4.0, [but] they can make a D or an F in your class and not graduate. Then, knowing that they can't just make up the class—they have to wait a whole other year to catch it when it comes back around. That's a lot of pressure.

Douglas was asked if some of this pressure stemmed from a possible perception by students that he was a roadblock to their progress. He replied:

Yeah, yeah. I don't like to think about it that way because if you're being... I think the student may perceive it that way and even other faculty members may perceive it that way. Again, a lot of times I tell students it's not about "like"... The grade that I assign you has nothing to do with if I like you or not. It's about work and about quality of work. But I think sometimes faculty members make it about "like," or, this is a good student or this student has had a rough life, so I need to give them or I need to help them along; and I think the surprise comes when [the students] come upon somebody or on a work situation that doesn't do that—that treats them the same as everyone else—[that] is when it becomes challenging. I just think that there is [also] pressure in the big picture... There is pressure in the context of the university of like, Hey that's a good student. Why are they all of a sudden struggling in your class?

There is the... I mean, I'll just say it... there is always the fear of, if I give this student a bad grade, what's going to happen? Are they going to file a grievance or... there is that pressure. More so for me, it's the pressure of knowing that [that] person, whoever that student is, and this student in

particular, is going to go out... they're going to go out and be intervening with families, and knowing that I didn't do everything I could, which may mean being that roadblock, to prepare them to go and do that work. That's an immense amount of pressure and the more invested you are in your students, the more pressure it is.

Douglas sees this gate-keeping commitment as imperative, and when protecting the profession requires holding back an individual student (closing a door to that student), he views the consequences in a larger context of "doing right." He said:

But it's also, even in that [moment] it can be rewarding in the sense that you know that you did what was right. You know that you, if this person wasn't prepared to do their academic work then there is a pretty good chance that they weren't prepared to go out and intervene in somebody's life. So you have to think about it both ways, you can't just think about it one way. In that way it becomes, you did what needed to be done. Your job as a...yeah, you may be a faculty member, but you are a social work professional.

Douglas's comment above—"you have to think about it both ways"—suggested the dimensional aspect of questioning one's role as a social work educator. Throughout our conversation, Douglas expressed his desire to contribute to students' personal and professional growth and, when possible, to open doors for students that may have been closed to them because of under-preparation. However, when a student's performance didn't meet his expectations, he determined that his role as a faculty member and a social work professional meant being a gate-keeper rather than attempting to benefit the student in some way that might compensate for previous injustices.

Although social work educators seem to discuss their role in static terms—"I am a gate keeper," they experience their role as a shifting element of their work with under-prepared students. For example, Nora views her gate-keeping role as paramount to other roles she may play, but she suggests that there is a balancing act between gate-keeper and door-opener that occurs throughout the work with each student:

So individualize and pull on their strengths, but don't be afraid to do that... we just... social workers are working with vulnerable people and we can't just pass on vulnerable people through our program because we care about them without being attentive to what they're going to be doing in the future. So a higher priority is to stop students from progressing if they're not competent. But that's more important than supporting a vulnerable student themselves and when possible, you can do both, and then it's just amazing to be able to graduate those students. But the highest priority is to not let them be part of our profession if they're not meeting the high standards that we have.

Although the quote above emphasizes the gate-keeping role, Nora's statement that, "...when possible, you can do both, and then it's just amazing to be able to graduate those students" seemed pivotal. In light of the whole of the data, "doing both" required a process of discernment by social work educators of when to lean into the gate keeping role and when to lean into the door opener role. Participants' understanding of what it meant to be a social work educator included both roles, but it also required a dynamic assessment and reassessment of which role might best reflect a social work educator in a given moment, especially when these roles were in conflict. Although participants held these roles in tension, they also moved within the dimension—their understanding of their role evolved and changed as their understanding of students and students' contexts changed.

Participant comments suggest that their day-to-day activities, interactions, and decisions related to under-prepared students were undergirded by questioning who they are in the moment—gate-keeper or door-opener. Participants communicated a sense of fulfillment from both developing future colleagues who may have experienced historical injustices and protecting future clients who may be vulnerable and may experience negative consequences from incompetent social work practice. Questioning one's role in

the current moment and in each unfolding moment is implicit to working with under-prepared students.

Responsibility dimension. The second dimension was the responsibility dimension. This dimension reflects the questioning of the educator's responsibilities and the student's responsibilities throughout the experience of working together. Social work educators are committed to fulfilling their responsibilities to students—to set clear expectations for students, provide opportunities to prepare for, practice, and demonstrate personal and professional development, and to provide support and resources to students throughout the development process. Educators also expect that students take responsibility for using those opportunities and resources, and for working diligently toward their personal and professional development. Uncertainty about the boundaries of responsibility emerges for social work educators from knowing that a lack of diligence from students to use opportunities or to engage with educators is a sign of under-preparation and may be a manifestation of historical injustices experienced by the students. Educators attempt to determine when their responsibility to motivate students and to compensate for historic injustices ends and when students' responsibilities to proactively engage begin. Participants dynamically moved within this dimension depending on the context of an individual student or a group of students, and often questioned this line between the educator's responsibility and the students' responsibility.

Although participants often expressed confidence in their ability to determine a line between educator and student responsibilities, their stories about *individual* students suggested that the ongoing questioning of responsibility was less clear. Questioning where an educator's responsibilities are positioned in relation to a student's

responsibilities is subject to educators' individual histories, students' individual histories, and both educators' and students' perceptions of one another. Although the specific definitions of responsibility are different from educator to educator and student to student, determining the boundaries of responsibility is an undercurrent to working with under-prepared students.

Even when the desire to fulfill responsibilities to students—all students—is high, determining what this meant in day-to-day interactions was unclear for research participants. Zachary discussed his initial experiences of responding to his desire to be a responsible social work educator and the process he took to refine his understanding of what that meant. He said:

For me, I think particularly at the outset, it was a struggle because you are feeling, or at least I was feeling, that I was deficient. So when you are asking about, Are students unprepared when they come in?, I would say that there is a match on the other side of the lectern in terms of doctoral students, at least that was my experience... was that there was little to no regard given to this idea of teaching and the importance of teaching and what to do.

...I had a responsibility to improve my teaching, and what I did was, I had to go to mentors and talk to them about, What do you do with a first generation student?, What do you do with an ESL student?, How do you structure office hours?, How do you structure assignments?, and that was invaluable to me. I was fortunate in that I was in [a large metropolitan area] and there are, at least at the time that I was there, there was [many] different social work programs that were operating concurrently within probably [several] miles of one another. So I had access to mentors at different institutions. So again, long answer to a short question—I just felt that it was incumbent upon me to improve my skills and had to go to somebody else in order to be able to do that.

Similarly, Christine, when asked to clarify how she understood her role, echoed Zachary's comments, stating:

Well, I think that's an excellent question because I don't think I was ever given any kind of... well we did have, in my doctoral program, we did

have a class on pedagogy and I know that that's unusual for lots of doc programs to have. It was an excellent class—really, really great class—but the classroom management was... [it] didn't talk anything about students that were so poorly prepared that... and what do you do with that, and how do you manage your time and what are the boundaries?

Now, after teaching for many years, Christine continues to question her understanding.

When asked to discuss her experience with an under-prepared student outside of the classroom, she responded:

I feel that I try to put things in place for students that they have the opportunity to gain and improve, and I'm willing to put in the extra time to help them as long as they're working. But I grapple with, I mean, I really struggle at times with, "Am I working harder than they are?"

Later, she again brings our conversation back to moments of uncertainty.

I want to go back to one thing because it's something that I've been working hard trying to figure out. I truly think that I don't have any of the answers and when it comes to how much support do you give a student who has really, really severe deficits—how far do you go? Where does your responsibility as an educator to put things in place that they can access... where does that stop and where does, well... they have the internet, they can go find these books on writing skills and they can do this and they can do that. I have a hard time with that. How much is too much and where are those boundaries? I'm still working on all of that.

I don't know the answer and I feel sometimes that maybe I'm on the wrong track—maybe I should just let things go. If they're strong enough, they'll figure it out on their own, but I haven't [done that] yet because I don't think I ever will.

Both Zachary and Christine discussed moments of uncertainty or conflict in which they thought about what it meant to be a social work educator in terms of responsibility.

Christine's comments suggested her evolving understanding when she said, "How much is too much and where are those boundaries? I'm still working on all of that." This type of questioning was part of the ongoing process of determining what it meant to be a social work educator in terms of personal responsibility.

Questioning boundaries of responsibility also entails understanding one's biases toward under-preparation and one's potential contributions to ongoing injustice towards students. Social work educators experience a sense of responsibility to not further marginalize under-prepared students, but the boundaries of that responsibility are easily confused with the vague boundaries of students' responsibilities, especially when a manifestation of under-preparation may be that students do not understand their responsibilities. (Here, the responsibility dimension overlaps with the first theme of understanding under-preparation as social injustice—an understanding that influences how educators understand educator and student responsibilities.) Nora describes a clouded process of questioning responsibilities as she recalled her initial teaching experiences:

When I came here... I was the only person here, it was really small. It was really hard for me, and I think I gave too many students too many breaks, and didn't support the students enough, either. But the bigger error was maybe passing on students who weren't really qualified enough because I felt like I didn't want my individual bias to prevent a student from getting their degree.

Now, after teaching for many years, she described an evolution in her understanding, and she when asked to talk about her current work with students, she replied:

Well, it takes time, and our efforts aren't always, you don't know that there's good effects for all of those efforts, sometimes. And then often times we're kind of on that line—out of a 1000 points, a student is three points from having that required "C"—should I bump them up those three points? Did I really grade them fairly on all of those assignments along the way? And should I bump them up or not? Those moments of some tension or when grading their paper, am I doing it fairly or am I giving them extra points because I know they really tried hard and... so those tensions are there, am I holding them to the same standard as somebody else, which we clearly want to.

And in keeping track, we have a lot on our plate, so right now of my 30 students in Intro, 35 maybe, am I really paying enough attention to them?

And then I feel guilty when I think about that one student I was telling you about, oh my gosh, I should have followed up on her. And then part of it... then you can also have that counter-argument in your head, well wait a second, they're adults and if they're not... I did reach out to her, she was going to come, we set up an appointment and then she didn't make it, so am I working harder than she is, and is that counterproductive, and sometimes you've got to figure all those things out. It's true, I don't want to... it is their degree and when should I be supporting and reaching out and supporting them and when does that become, what do you call it, enabling or whatever so figuring that out takes some emotional energy and then it's heartbreaking when you put in a lot of effort and then students disappear or they fail, especially when some students may be, against our best advice, they take too many credits compared to what's going on in their life and then they fail and then we give them the same advice the next semester and then they don't follow it and then it just gets... at that point, we've given you advice, we've supported you, we've tried to help you, and then you've made your own choices and so now you've failed and now you're not going to have enough financial aid to graduate. In those cases, we feel like that's kind of their deal so I don't feel so bad. But sometimes they try really, really hard and they're just not able to do it even with the supports, and so it's tough.

Nora's comments revolve around the idea that "... sometimes you've got to figure those things out." Even after teaching for many years and working with many under-prepared students, it is not always clear for Nora about where to draw lines—when to say she has fulfilled her responsibilities to students to not further marginalize them and to provide them with the support and resources necessary for success. Although her comments suggest she has honed her understanding of those lines, there are students that still fall "on that line" for her, and she must re-assess what it means to fulfill her responsibilities as an educator in that moment.

Fulfilling one's responsibilities as an educator can be confused with student success. Social work educators can view students' successes as an indicator that they have successfully fulfilled their responsibilities, or they can view students' failures as an indicator of unfulfilled educator-responsibilities. The process of questioning an

educator's position within the responsibility dimension cannot be solely discerned from students' outcomes. Julian's comments reflected this process of self-discernment as it related to student outcomes. During our conversation, Julian repeatedly said that he tries not to get "too emotional" about students' failures or successes. For example, he said:

So it gets a little discouraging when you spend some time and give them feedback and they don't take it and they don't use it, and [they] turn in the same poor paper the next time. But that's where it's just natural, logical consequences. Thus, if you do the same poor work, you still get the same poor grade, and that's just the way it is. [I] just try not to be too emotional about it. That's the choice they're making and I'm here, I'm ready. I will do what I can.

He was asked what it meant to "not get too emotional." Julian's response suggested an attempt to not take students' failures or successes as a personal reflection on his work—he did not equate his own success at fulfilling his responsibilities with students' successes at fulfilling their responsibilities. Even if a student did not do well in his class, it did not mean he did not fulfill his responsibilities to that student, and it might have meant that he fulfilled responsibilities to his social work program or to the profession. He said:

I remember one time when I was getting my MSW, one of my faculty members said one of the wisest things I have ever heard, and I have held onto this my entire career. She said, 'Don't ever work harder than the client.' I would apply that to [working with under-prepared students]. I don't work harder than the student. I'll work hard and I will be there, and if they seek out my help, [then] I am there and ready, and I will put a lot of work in even before I know whether they are going to work. But at that point, it's kind of up to them. If they're not putting in the effort, I'm not going to bang my head. It's just a choice they're making, and they just have to understand we don't just pass out the grades. You have to earn it and if you're willing to do the work, I'm willing to go there with you.

I think it may be a Chinese saying or I've heard the saying that if the student's not learning, perhaps it's the teacher and the way they teach. So I am cognizant of that—that I need to teach in a manner that promotes learning. But, at the same time, there is also the equal element that the student has to be motivated and willing to do the work. So it's not personal. Yeah, I'm kind of sad if a student does fail a course or ends up

maybe having to drop out of the program. But I also think, Well, they must not have been ready and maybe they need some time to work a little bit, get some life experience, and they'll come back. Or, they're just not ready to be a social worker and maybe they need to be an English teacher instead or something.

When working with underprepared students, Julian continuously monitored the fulfillment of his personal responsibilities and the fulfillment by students of their responsibilities, and tried not to confuse the two. Although Julian's comments might suggest a boundary of "not working harder than the student," this boundary is vague and changing. Working harder than one student might look very different from working harder than another student, and so the boundaries between educator responsibilities and student responsibilities move within the responsibility dimension depending on context.

Movement within the responsibility dimension and that movement's relationship with student contexts is especially meaningful for social work educators who are working with under-prepared students. (Here, again, the responsibility dimension overlaps with the first theme of understanding under-preparation as social injustice.) Although educators might move within this dimension while working with prepared or well-prepared students, an understanding of under-preparation as social injustice carries an ethical charge for social work educators, and so educators' movement within the dimension becomes more pronounced, even jarring and conflictual, as they attempt to respond to this ethical charge. When asked to talk about her experience with under-prepared students, Gayle discussed this conflict:

Unfortunately what...there's this constant...when you're dealing with students who have needs that are greater than your traditional classroom, it feels like there's this constant push and pull of boundaries. And you know, it can be really easy, I think, to get sucked into wanting to meet our own needs by helping them meet theirs, and that's not...we can't do that.

We have to remind ourselves to not get too involved to the point where we're meeting our own needs.

It's hard... I think even for us as social work professionals, it's hard because we do have... on one hand we do have the training to try and help students in more detail, but on the other hand, that... we get into role conflicts. You know most of us, many of us anyway, have some interpersonal counseling training and most of us are just generally empathic people. And whether it's personal problems or truly not being prepared-to-study problems, I think that many social workers find themselves getting drawn in a little bit more deeply than many of our [non-social work] colleagues.

Specific clarification of what it meant to “meet our own needs” was not sought, but considering this phrase in the context of Gayle’s other comments (and in the context of the whole data set), one interpretation of “meeting our own needs” is equating our own success with students’ success, and doing what we can to ensure students’ success so that we meet our own need to feel successful—that we successfully fulfilled our responsibilities to students. But not every student will succeed, even when an educator has been a responsible educator. Gayle emphasized this point when she was asked how she might guide a new colleague on working with under-prepared students:

So, you might need to *not* take it personally if a student isn't succeeding in your class, but pull them aside and try and find out if there are some barriers that need to be bridged. Because I hear that a lot from people, you know—they get frustrated, they take it personally if a student isn't doing well. And so I'm trying to remind my new colleagues that if [students are] really stressing about schedule, and you're trying to monkey with the schedule, maybe there are other things that are going on that are causing them...you know they've got a work schedule outside of here. They're working 25-30 hours, in some cases, trying to balance the load. [I'd tell them] to remember it's not always just about you, it's not always just about the college, there might be other things going on. And even if we can't deal with those [things], we should at least be mindful of them.

Gayle adopted an understanding that being mindful of students' challenges did not require her (or others) to resolve those challenges. She was willing to “bridge” some

barriers, but she could not take on the responsibility for removing all barriers. Similarly, Sheryl discussed bridging barriers, but recognized the limits of her responsibility to students:

So, in trying to figure some of that stuff out... so, there's advocating [for students], and then there's putting as many educational supports in place as you can—doing reviews, flash cards, all the tool stuff. But when it comes right down to it if, at the end of the day, they can't do the work or they can't come up to some sort of standard, they're going to fail. And it's really sad, but it does happen. And I can honestly tell you that for [students] that would really come and work with me, I'll come to office hours [and] work with you individually; I was always available to people in that respect. But if they either didn't do that or just couldn't do the work at the end of the day, some of them did fail. And it doesn't feel good when that happens, but it does happen.

Like other participants, she states that “it doesn't feel good” when students fail, but Sheryl seemed to experience a sense of satisfaction that she has done her part—that she has fulfilled her responsibilities. Participants experienced internal conflict related to finding and maintaining boundaries to their responsibilities, but also experienced resolve to fulfill those responsibilities in spite of the every-day internal conflicts that might arise.

Working with under-prepared students requires educators to confront their personal limits and to determine boundaries to their level of responsibility to each student. Sheryl and Carmen specifically discussed the growing number of under-prepared students with whom they worked. Setting context for her experience, Carmen discussed the growing number of students whom she believed were under-prepared:

I must say that in the last... okay, so I've been here a little over twenty years... So, I would say in the last seven years at least we have seen significant increases in the number of under-prepared students. And particularly, not just academically, but particularly students whose family needs and mental health needs get in the way of their, you know, ability to perform optimally in the program.

When asked what was most important for the current author to know about her experience working with under-prepared students, she said:

So as a social worker, for me, what stands out is this incredible sadness about what's happening with kids in school. And, as an educator at the collegiate level, feeling as if we maybe can make a difference to an individual student, but as you get this critical mass, just more and more of these kids from under-resourced schools, it becomes very difficult to work with all of them at the level that they need to be worked with. I was always committed to doing my best to work with students so that they could come up to the standard that they needed to be at, but it gets harder and harder when you have so many of them.

In this context of a growing number of under-prepared students, a sense of responsibility to all under-prepared students can be overwhelming. When faced with the magnitude of need from students, participants intuitively invoked a form of triage—an assessment of which students might engage in a productive balance between educator responsibility and student responsibility, and might best use or benefit from extra support or attention from educators. This assessment was based on students demonstrating engagement with the educator and making consistent efforts toward improvement. This type of triage was an initial way for participants to determine when and where their responsibility began with individual students. This initial assessment does not diminish the ongoing, day-to-day questioning of boundaries between educator-responsibility and student-responsibility, but it brings the questioning process within a feasible scale—narrowing the number of potential students with whom an educator can realistically work.

Although participants offered potential indicators of students who might benefit from additional attention such as work ethic and engagement, these indicators were subjective and unclear. Rather than using a checklist of such indicators, social work educators rely on intuitive perceptions rooted in their prior experiences with students and

in comparative experiences with other current students. These prior and comparative experiences helped educators define the indicators that they used for assessing the potential of students to share responsibility for the student's progress. For example, Carmen was asked to tell more about her day-to-day experience with a student and how her work with this student began. She shared:

I think ... when I see students who are ... you know, you walk into a class at the beginning of the semester and, you know, there's some people who can't really bear to look up from their cell phones and there are other people at the other end of the continuum who are giving you, you know, their full attention. You start to make ... I think most faculties start to make some assessments about how invested a student is in a particular class. But, anyway, so from the beginning of class she stood out to me. And I was impressed because she was one who clearly... she was, you know, making eye contact. She was writing things down. You know, she appeared to be engaged in the class and in the material. And I think for many of us we respond to that, you know, but if I see somebody who's kind of nodding a head as I speak or smiling or looking at me and then writing something down, well, then I feel affirmed, you know, as a faculty member. And so my tendency is to respond back to that person. And that's not to say, I mean, I do try—when I see that students are not engaged—I do try to engage them, but I'm just saying that's the initial kind of reaction I think that is fairly natural that we respond to people who seem to be responding to us. And so I do remember that that stood out from the beginning, that she appeared to be, you know, interested and engaged.

Similarly, when Alejandro was talking about a student with whom he had worked, he said:

He started participating in class discussions, he started... When I started working with him, he would sit in the back of the classroom and sort of stare off in space, maybe occasionally write a note. As I got him engaged, he started sitting more toward the front of the classroom taking notes, asking good questions, that sort of thing. ... So he was the most obvious one...

The perception of certain students as “standing out” or as “obvious” candidates for additional support was evidence of educators’ triage of students, that the “stand out”

students demonstrated the indicators used by the participants to assess for potential balanced responsibility between educator and student.

The act of students seeking help consistently showed up in the interviews as an indicator of an “engaged” student. Students who asked questions, asked for help, and then used the resources that were provided were the students that educators assessed as reciprocating responsibility. Focusing on these “engaged” students helps educators determine boundaries for the educators’ responsibilities—how many students their responsibilities will encompass. As previously discussed, determining how much responsibility to take with students can be especially difficult when students’ lack of engagement may be a symptom of under-preparation. When faced with an increasing number of under-prepared students—students who may not be engaged with the instructor or the academic process—educators intuitively limit their scope of responsibility to those students who are engaged, who intentionally ask for and respond to assistance.

Educators’ limiting their scope of responsibility allowed the opportunity to work individually with an under-prepared student to present itself—it allowed the opportunity to rise to the surface. As mentioned earlier, working individually with an under-prepared student can obscure what educators consider clear boundaries of responsibility that are taken for granted when working with students in general. Social work educators seem to possess an intuitive openness to working through these obscured boundaries of responsibility with some students—students who emerged through a triage process. Participants’ experiences spoke to using student-engagement as a way for educators to narrow their scope of responsibility and allow for work with an individual under-prepared

student to develop. When asked how Gayle balanced roles and boundaries, her comments quickly turned to how she determines her sense of responsibility to individual students. Gayle said:

I kind of try to... I try to suspend a rigid, if you do one thing for one student, you have to do it for all of them, and kind of open up that boundary to, you know, if a student is going to ask for help studying on a test and they're going to come in and ask me some questions... you know, if you took the initiative to come in and see me, then I'll probably be willing to answer your questions. I'll be willing to help you with an outline. I'll be willing to help you edit your paper. If you come in and ask me, and so it's kind of a boundary with some of my students who are struggling, I will offer the help to them initially, but I'm not going to chase them down and I'm not going to do it for them.

Gayle recognized her own limits—that she cannot help every student and cannot be equally responsible to every student—and that she experienced a heightened sense of responsibility to students who asked for help. Gayle offered an example of a student with whom she had worked. She said:

And she'd just, you know she came in with a whole lot of non-existent confidence both personally and academically, and she's gained the confidence that she can come to me ahead of a paper and we work on an outline together. I don't think I do that level of helping another student prepare for an outline for a paper, for anybody else, but I'm comfortable with that, 'cause she's the only one who asks.

Similarly, Maggie narrowed her sense of responsibility to students who asked for help. She said:

I know it's mostly yours to manage, but how can I assist you to get to your other goal, which is to graduate from the program? That's really, the students who don't... I offer that to all of the students, not every student takes it. In that respect I don't really think it's my job to make them take it. But for the students who can catch that vision of themselves being graduated and working as a professional, I'll do everything I can to make that happen for them, with them.

The experience of working individually with under-prepared students presents itself to educators through this narrowed scope of responsibility. Once the work with an

individual student develops, then movement along the responsibility dimension becomes more dynamic and reflects the changing day-to-day interactions of the educator and the student. This dynamic process with students in complex circumstances does not, and cannot, occur with every under-prepared student, so educators intuitively allow the experience with individual students to emerge through a triage process.

Regina offered an example of how she determines her level of responsibility with under-prepared students in convoluted circumstances. When students' stories are complex, it is difficult for educators to determine how much responsibility they should take to positively intervene in the academic progress of students. Regina discussed one of her strategies for defining her responsibility in relation to students' responsibility. She said:

One of the strategies, I guess, that I've tried to use is that I, I present myself as fairly inflexible around standards both in my syllabus and in early discussions in my classes, but I am not inflexible. But it is a strategy, which is, then I feel like only the real, real crises rise to the surface so it's only... I am muttering here... I am prepared with lots of crisis but they go together, lots of kind of you know my grandmother was hospitalized and I'm the only one in the family who is bi-lingual and so I have to go home to translate for example. That would be an example of a student who is then going to miss several classes or miss a key assignment but who plays such a significant role in their family's system. Anyway I use the strategy which is I don't want everybody coming up and telling me that their grandma died or whatever. I only want the person whose grandma really is very sick to come and say, I know that you say that you don't except late work but this is going on. And so I find that's a way that I can kind of help under-prepared students who have lots of complex issues around staying engaged in school to come forward. And they usually do. But I often swear them to secrecy. I will say, okay I am going to give you a break, but I don't want you telling anybody else because it just is a way for me to vet sometimes what is real and what's not.

Regina's specific approach above may be different from her colleagues, but assessing where one's responsibility sits in relation to a student's responsibility is an underlying

dimension for all educators while working with under-prepared students. A triage process of identifying engaged students helps educators determine the potential relationship between a student's responsibilities and the educator's responsibilities. Although students who seek and use help or resources are viewed as "engaged" students, the way in which educators make assessments is diverse, and the specific indicators used by educators are self-evident only to each individual educator.

This ongoing questioning of where the responsibilities of the educator sit in relation to the responsibilities of the student reflects the second dimension—the responsibility dimension—of questioning what it means to be a social work educator. Uncertainty about responsibilities emerges for social work educators from knowing that a lack of engagement from students—disregarding educators' offers of help or neglecting resources provided—may be manifestations of under-preparation and the historical injustices experienced by the students. So, educators attempt to determine when their responsibility to motivate students and to compensate for historic injustices ends and when students' responsibilities to proactively engage begin. Faced with an increasing number of under-prepared students, educators also intuitively limit the number of students with whom they will individually work through a process of assessing students' potential to reciprocate responsibility. Educators move within the responsibility dimension depending on individual student and educator circumstances, and the perceptions that students and educators have of one another.

Collegial dimension. The third dimension interpreted from interviews was the collegial dimension. This dimension reflects the ongoing questioning of how one's understandings of role and of students conform to the understandings of one's colleagues,

social work program, and school. The collegial dimension emphasizes that the meaning of being a social work educator is relationally constructed—rather than defining meaning in isolation, educators interact with colleagues and then understand their personal perspectives in terms of resonance or dissonance with colleagues’ perspectives. Comparing one’s understanding of role and perspective to the understandings of peers creates an experience of resonance or dissonance. The experience of resonance or dissonance helps educators clarify their understanding of what it means to be a social work educator.

Sometimes collegial interaction was informal—participants might have impromptu conversations with peers to discuss a specific issue encountered with a student. Other times collegial interaction was more formal—participants would discuss students’ situations in committee meetings or in faculty reviews of students. Whether formal or informal, these conversations shaped how participants viewed themselves, their roles, and their responsibilities, especially in their work with under-prepared students.

Peer interaction and feedback were experiences that helped shape participants’ understanding of their role. While describing a particularly challenging experience with underprepared students, Sheryl indicated that discussing the experience with a colleague helped her to gain perspective:

So I think I was able to build some frustrations to empathy. I think we both were able to do that because we were both really frustrated. And we actually talked about it in a faculty meeting and actually the whole faculty was experiencing the same issue. And while we never came to any conclusions with the faculty, it felt like at least my one colleague and I were able to sort of come up with some strategies to help. Sometimes it takes processing with another person to get there because I do think faculty [members] need each other to process these sorts of things.

Sheryl's comment suggests that the meaning she created from her experience was formed through interaction with colleagues. Underneath this interaction, there is an underlying experience of comparing one's perspective with the perspectives of colleagues, viewing one's perspective as resonant or dissonant to those of colleagues, and then using one's position within the collegial dimension as a marker for interpreting one's role with under-prepared students.

Participants' movement within this dimension was dynamic and changed with different students and within different student-contexts. Although one participant expressed her perception that she and her colleagues were "in exactly the same place" in their understanding of students, her stories about individual students and the whole of interview data suggest that educators' perceptions of resonance with peers changed from moment to moment, context to context. The experience of resonance is influenced by two changing sets of perceptions: 1) one's self-perception of how well one's own approach with under-prepared students fits with one's understanding of being a social work educator, and 2) one's perception of how well peers' approaches fit with one's understanding of being a social work educator. These two sets of perceptions interact and change over time, and an educator's position within the collegial dimension reflects a moment-in-time understanding of what it means to that educator to be a social work educator. The next moment—the next student or student context—may reflect a new or changed understanding. Regardless of viewing one's understanding as resonate or dissonant, the experience of questioning one's position within this dimension provides markers by which social work educators determine and refine what it means to be a social work educator.

Even when movement within the dimension is subtle or when one's position within the dimension is relatively stable, the comparison of one's own perspective to the perspective of peers shapes the experience of working with under-prepared students. Nora provided evidence of this experience of stability within the dimension and how her perceptions of peers provided markers by which she understood her work. Nora was asked what it was like for her to work with students who showed potential as a social worker, but who struggled academically. Nora began to describe how she often questioned how to work with those students or how she questioned the outcomes of her work. She then said:

And it's so wonderful that I have colleagues... My colleagues are in exactly the same place I am in terms of really wanting those students to succeed and while also holding to high standards. So we know that we're not going to just pass them through because we feel sorry for them. And we're not going to give them many academic breaks. We're going to support them and we're going to meet them, we're going to be as available as we can, we're going to care about them, but they still have to meet the standards. And so in the cases where students don't meet the standards, and it's just so hard to fail a student a second time or sometimes the last time, it's so hard but I can do that with the support of my colleagues that remind me how important this is and remind me that we've given every chance that we could and remind me that we can't put students out there that aren't prepared. So having that really makes a huge difference, to know that I'm going to hold a student to those high standards and when it gets tough for me, I've got colleagues that will support me. By that time, the colleagues will know the student too and maybe they'll say, you know I think you do need to give a student a break. I do think we need to do this because there's things you haven't noticed and so it's like a team, a team effort for us to support these students and in those cases where we can't let them keep moving through. That's a team effort too.

After describing the collaborative team approach above, she recounted the type of interactive feedback that she sought from colleagues that helped her understand her role in particularly challenging situations:

...I'll run it by my colleagues who aren't so personally involved and they can... they'll ask some questions and, okay, what about this, what about this and I think you need... it sounds like in this case, you do need to give the student an extra break because of that and that or no, that is how it is and they're going to have to learn so then I don't...then it's not so much totally on my plate. If I tell my colleagues a story and they ask questions and they say, No Nora, you need to give them a "C-" and have them take it again. Then I can...I feel bad, but I'm confident it's the right decision. But if I just had to do it on my own, I'd be second-guessing myself and feeling bad.

Conforming her views and actions to those of her colleagues guided Nora's understanding of her role with under-prepared students and helped her to make sense of the everyday situations she encountered. If she would rely on her own, perhaps isolated understanding of how to respond to a student, she would second-guess herself, but when she used the collective understanding of her colleagues as a marker for responding to students, she expressed confidence in her response—"...it's the right decision." The meaning of what is "right" for her as a social work educator is created, in part, by positioning herself as conforming with, resonant with, colleagues.

The differences perceived among one's self and one's colleagues also helps to sharpen educators' perspectives on themselves and their work with under-prepared students. Regina's comments speak to this experience. During our interview, Regina stated that working with under-prepared students can be especially difficult when social work faculty have diverse perspectives on the experience, and she was asked to tell more

about these diverse perspectives. At first, she describes the context of this experience in terms of “academic freedom:”

Yeah, you know just because everybody has academic freedom in their classrooms, you know, we all tend to try to handle things in different ways which would be fine if we weren’t then a *program*. But as a program we need to have some consistency for students about what is acceptable and what’s not and a criterion for entering field work and of course the role of gate-keeping becomes really important. And so I think each of us kind of, in isolation... I think every faculty member feels good about how they choose to handle their classroom and issues around attendance and issues around lateness and issues around supplemental support and those kinds of things, but as a program finding the common ground can be pretty challenging.

Regina was asked how her personal perspective and finding “common ground” with her colleagues fit together with the experience of working with under-prepared students. Her response reflected an internal conflict between conformity and nonconformity with colleagues:

At first it felt vastly, it felt like there was a real big difference in my individual standards and then what the programmatic standards were. And I used to fight that fight a lot. Like, Oh, my gosh, No! We can’t let them move into the practice sequence because they’re failing or they’re incapable. We’ve got to make them retake that course, or whatever. And now I feel like, with some professional maturity, that I’m more judicious about the battles that I choose to fight. And I am probably less interested in the collective opinion than I used to be. I used to bring forward a lot of students to discuss and just found that to be really challenging—information overload when I would get lots of perspectives from all [of the] faculty members; raising dilemmas to the public levels then put yourself out there for a lot of scrutiny about how you decided to resolve an issue or a conflict or how to grade, etc. I think that I both became more confident in my ability to do those types of assessments and also a little more protective of the decisions that I had made so as not to have a lot of controversy. So part of it is just maturity, I think.

Working through this “scrutiny” from peers helped refine Regina’s understanding of her role. Regina’s waning interest in the collective opinion suggested movement toward nonconformity. This nonconformity served as a comparison by which she clarified her

own understanding of her approach—the dissonance served as a marker for how she saw herself as an educator.

Similarly, Christine described experiencing criticism of her approach by colleagues. As she told stories about her work with under-prepared students, it sounded like her work with students extended to outside of the classroom. When asked about it, her focus immediately changed from her work with students to her experience with colleagues:

I don't know if this is something that you're even interested in hearing about, but I have a wonderful bunch of colleagues that I work with. But we do have different ways of looking at things. I was quite criticized and continued to be criticized by my colleagues about spending so much time working on things that other colleagues in my department feel that... if [students] don't have it, that they either sink or swim, and if they don't get it, it's personal responsibility and it's their problem and enough said.

Later, Christine provided an example of her nonconformity:

...I'm a kind of a systems person, I try to be very cognizant that change can be very frightening to people, and even if I don't consider it big change, some people feel that it's big change. It took me two years to get my department to approve me having these tutorials [after class] that I do on my own time and cost the department nothing, okay? It's not like they're giving cookies out or have to pay for a room or anything like that. But, the arguments I got from my colleagues were that, 'This is college. If [students] can't do it, then let them go.'

When attention was drawn to her experience of working with students outside of the classroom, she understood that experience as dissonant with the perspectives of her colleagues. Christine's understanding of what it means for her to be a social work educator was shaped, in part, through this dissonance and the criticism she received.

Criticism of colleagues' perspectives—a form of dissonance or nonconformity—was also a way to contextualize and understand one's own perspective. Both Alejandro and Douglas turned critical eyes upon colleagues' approaches as a way to clarify their

own perspectives and their work with under-prepared students. Alejandro said, “I’m known for my unorthodox way of teaching.” When asked to discuss what he meant by unorthodox, he said:

Well, as a faculty member I take it as my responsibility to educate the students that I have, whether I consider them prepared, unprepared, it is my responsibility to educate them, to move them from wherever they are to wherever they need to go. And I have spent a lot of my career looking at how one does that. I reject all the sort of fear or scare tactics that faculty use, This will be on the exam. If you haven’t read this and turned in your notes by Thursday . . . , blah, blah, blah, because I don’t think fear is a good motivator for learning.

When asked to say more about what he meant by his responsibility, he shared:

One, that’s kind of what social work is all about—is working with people who need assistance, that’s kind of why our profession exists. Two, I consider the responsibility of faculty to help all students succeed. I mean I hear a lot of faculty say, Well, we’ll just fail them out, whatever. And I object to that. We ought to at least put in some effort to try to keep them from failing out, to try to help them.

Objecting to and rejecting the approaches of colleagues served as markers by which Alejandro understood his experience. Likewise, Douglas critiqued his colleagues’ work with students as a way to explain his understanding of how one *should* work with students. Not only did he describe his work and his perspective, but, to help clarify his perspective, he also provided examples of how other educators respond differently to students and how he believed those responses affected students:

I always tell people lead with the points and the behaviors will follow. What I mean by that is sometimes we’ll tell a student, Hey, this paper is not good, it’s not where it needs to be. You need a whole lot of work on this paper. But the paper gets a B. So you see the kind of mixed messages that goes on there? So there are students saying, Oh, I’m not prepared, but it’s all good because I made a B. So I’m just going to keep being unprepared because evidently it gets me B’s [and] I can live with that.

He later described how he directly confronts these issues with his colleagues:

So we spend a lot of time talking about... [my colleagues will] say, I'm concerned about this student. I'll say, What are the grades you gave them? [They'll say,] Oh, I gave them a B. Well then you must not have been too concerned because if you were true to the process and not just being "nice" then your concern would be reflected in the grade. You can't come to me saying you are so concerned about this student and their work when you gave them an A. Those two things just don't match, you're sending mixed messages. If you're concerned about a student and their work, it should be reflected in the outcome assessments that you give them.

His critique of colleagues' approaches was a way for Douglas to understand his own work with under-prepared students. The comparison of one's own perspective with colleagues' perspectives is an underlying experience to working with under-prepared students—it helps educators make sense of their experience. Criticizing colleagues—identifying dissonance—is one way that social work educators discern what it means for them to be social work educators.

An assessment of resonance or dissonance with colleagues is not static. Educators move back and forth along this dimension as contexts change. Douglas, who earlier exemplified a nonconforming view of himself, also described moments of conformity with colleagues. When asked what one would see if someone shadowed him as he worked with under-prepared students, he described the following:

You would see me (pause)... a lot of times I consult with my colleagues. I'm like, Hey, I got this paper and I gave this paper a grade and I want you to look at it and tell me real quick what you think about the paper, just to kind of see if I'm on point, to see if, maybe, do I need to go back and maybe I'm being too hard, maybe I'm being too easy; just to kind of double-check myself. And I think that's an important part of teaching, that you always seek feedback on things, especially if I have a paper where a student is not prepared around writing and I grade it and the grade is not particularly good. I'll give one of my colleagues [an anonymous] paper and say, Hey, look at this for me and let me know what you think. Nine times out of ten they also think that the paper is poor and it would get a poor grade.

Douglas' prior critique of his colleagues' perspectives and then his desire to find validation of his perspective both related to assessing students' work. Both stories sound as if they focus on a single topic—grading—but they reflect differing perspectives on his colleagues' approaches. His stories offered examples of how educators move within the collegial dimension as they work with different students or within different situations. The nature of the comparison, moving toward conformity or nonconformity, is irrelevant. Regardless of one's position within the dimension, *questioning* one's position within the dimension—determining one's level of conformity to colleagues' perspectives in any given context—serves as a marker for understanding one's work.

The collegial dimension is the third dimension of questioning what it means to be a social work educator. This dimension reflects the ongoing interpretation of one's work with under-prepared students by assessing how one's understanding of this work conforms to the understandings of one's colleagues, one's social work program, and one's school. An understanding of being a social work educator is formed in conformity or nonconformity with colleagues. Regardless of conformity or nonconformity, the experience of questioning one's position within this dimension provides markers by which social work educators refine what it means to be a social work educator.

Theme summary. Social work educators experience a questioning of what it means to be a social work educator. This discernment is implicit to the phenomenon of working with under-prepared students. The data revealed intersecting, overlapping, and often convoluted experiences that created and recreated meaning for participants. These interwoven experiences reflected three dimensions within the process of discernment: the role dimension, the responsibility dimension, and the collegial dimension. The role

dimension reflects the dual commitments to protect the profession of social work and future clients, and to help under-prepared students to compensate for previous injustices and access the socio-economic benefits associated with completing an undergraduate degree. The responsibility dimension reflects the moving boundaries of where educators' responsibilities end and where students' responsibilities begin. The collegial dimension reflects how social work educators' understanding of their roles and of students conforms to their colleagues' understandings. Together, these three dimensions reflect an imbedded experience of questioning what it means to be a social work educator who is working with under-prepared students.

Recalling Compelling Moments

The meaning that social work educators create from working with under-prepared students is an extension of the educators' historical experiences, including experiences with previous students and experiences from before working with students. The evidence for historically rooted meaning-making showed up in participants' recollections of compelling moments—comments that referred to previous and meaningful experiences that are now used as context for understanding current experiences, and that compel educators to move forward or endure in their work with under-prepared students. These previous meaningful experiences included empathetic experiences and validating experiences. Empathetic experiences included moments from an educator's childhood, family, and primary or secondary schooling that the educator used to decrease the gap between the educator's experiences and the students' experiences (Hodges & Klein, 2001). Validating experiences included moments when an educator's previous work with an under-prepared student was remembered as especially meaningful, often when the

educator believed that they were able to uphold high standards for the profession while helping the under-prepared student be successful. Although participants' experiences seemed to naturally fall within one of these two categories of experience, the category *labels* were not intrinsic to the phenomenon of working with under-prepared students; rather, the two categories of experience were labeled as a way to organize data. The underlying structure—recalling historical experiences that created meaning in the present and also shaped an understanding of future work—was represented by empathetic and validating experiences and was intrinsic to working with under-prepared students.

Empathic experiences. During interviews with participants, questions and prompts focused on the educators' experiences with under-prepared students. However, inevitably the participants would tell a story about an historical experience that they had as a child or with a family member that somehow fit, in a personally meaningful way, with the experience of working with under-prepared students. This “fit” presented itself as empathy that helped educators understand and move forward through the experience of working with under-prepared students. Hodges and Klein (2001) define empathy as, “bridging the gap that exists between the self experience and others' experiences” (p. 438). As participants recounted complicated experiences with current students, they then drew upon their own historical experiences to help themselves understand the current context. Although participants stated that they did not know what it was like to be a particular student, they knew what it was like to personally navigate being under-prepared by recalling personal historical moments—the closest point-of-comparison to the experience of students. Getting closer to the experience of students shaped the meaning made from working with students.

These empathetic recollections also gave energy to educators' present-day and future work with students. The meaning that educators made by recalling personal stories often reinforced their understanding of under-preparation as a manifestation of students' inequitable experiences before college, and this understanding fueled the continuation of the educators' work. In this way, the theme of recalling compelling moments intersects with the initial theme of understanding under-preparation as social injustice—that under-preparation is the result of historic inequities such as poverty, under-resourced schools, conflicted families-of-origin, being the first generation to attend college, etc. Educators also seemed energized in their work by recalling individuals who had historically supported their own personal and professional development. Recalling moments with these personal mentors inspired educators now to do the same for the under-prepared students with whom they were working.

One participant, Maggie, called these compelling moments “Kairos” moments—moments that help individuals organize their life-world. Again, a life-world is the collection of mundane, taken-for-granted experiences we have in the context of everyday life (Smith et al., 2009). Maggie viewed moments from her youth as Kairos moments--organizing moments that helped her understand her students and the context of her work with students. One of these moments emerged for Maggie during our interview while she was talking about a particular student with whom she had worked. In the middle of describing the student's context, Maggie instinctively told a story about her own high school experience:

Just a little thing that makes a difference for me, I am actually dyslexic. Because [of the era in which I was born], it was a stroke of good fortune—being at the right place at the right time. I grew up on the east coast and was consistently told that I wouldn't be able to graduate from college

because at that time I was seen as lazy and seen as somebody who just didn't care enough—was too sloppy. It wasn't until I was in high school when one of my... I went to a fairly strict high school, and one of my teachers caught the fact that I was trying very hard, but wasn't making progress. She sent me to [a large research hospital] which was doing some pretty cutting-ground work. That's where they diagnosed me and, fortunately, I was able to get some self-correcting glasses. So the effort that I had been putting into C's and D's brought me to the place where I could then, in college, get A's and B's, having been told I couldn't go [to college]. So, I really care deeply about... I understand the difference between the person's innate ability and some of the impediments that might go along with that.

Later in our interview, Maggie was asked if this experience showed up for her in her work with under-prepared students. She answered:

Yeah, I think it was probably the juxtaposition for me. There is a Greek phrase called Kairos, which is an idea about time where it's basically the time from which everything is organized, and I think that human beings have Kairos moments, too. I think the moment in eighth grade where I was told I wouldn't be able to go to college because I couldn't pass the standardized test juxtaposed with this opportunity to get an understanding of what was going on—[that I was dyslexic]. They've been really important organizing events in my own structure. Again, because I came from a relatively privileged background, I didn't *have* to [go to college], and at the time that wouldn't have been necessary for me to achieve something. But I think I wanted to very badly, and I think many students who take the risk to get a higher education, especially when they've come from backgrounds that have put them in places where they're under-prepared, they are amazingly courageous, and I wasn't as courageous as [much as] I was supported.

Her experience with her teacher who helped her to identify and manage her dyslexia provided an organizing moment from which she gained insight into the contexts of her students. She understood students' under-preparation as a systemic issue with an array of potential contributing factors. From her own experience in high school, Maggie also understood her role with her students was, in part, to help them address contributing factors so that they could succeed academically. Recalling this compelling moment energized her current work with students in that it allowed Maggie to continue supporting

students in the way that she was supported and to experience her work as contributing to social justice.

Similarly, Christine's recollections illustrate the insight and energy educators gain from personal histories. Christine was initially asked how she understood her role with under-prepared students. As Christine discussed her ideas, she began to describe the context for her ideas, which included her background:

I came from a very—and I guess this is part of the reason why I am somewhat committed to this, I call it my mission—I came from a very, very poor background. I truly believe, as corny as it sounds, that the best way to rise out of poverty is to get a good education and to be able to earn more money. The school system that these students use as a reason for why they didn't learn basic English and math would have been the school system that I would have gone to, except I went to [private] schools. So, I see that, there for the grace of God, I could have been. Because of that, I truly feel, I want to give [my students] a chance.

She was then asked to help clarify how that background fit with her experience with under-prepared students. She then recalled an experience she had with one of her teachers, a Catholic nun, in primary school:

This is a corny story, but when I was in fourth grade, I was not doing very well at all. I couldn't read. Later they found out I had some hearing deficits, but they wouldn't have found those out if this one teacher hadn't seen something in me that she thought was worth working on. ...We got a check-up, found out I needed new eardrums, got new ear drums. [I] figured out, My goodness, this is what the world sounds like. But she made a deal with me that I could come and stay in the convent and help with the convent because I was an extremely religious person at that point in time. I would read a book every week. So I would walk to the neighborhood library, which was a mile away, and I started out reading really simple books until she smiled at me and she said, Oh, you can do better than this, and then I got hooked. She didn't have to encourage me anymore. I read and read and read and read and read and it became my way of escaping a not so good neighborhood and family life. I was getting reinforcement for being smart and I was the valedictorian of my high school. She was sitting in the auditorium when I did the valedictory address and I still bless her to this day.

I got out because of her. I'm not so sure I would have gotten out, because my family, my mother in particular, saw no use in education at all, so she was not at all supportive and my dad wasn't around much. [My teacher] sort of, she gave me a way out, and I live very well now. I'm not, I don't know if I'm rich quantitatively, but let me tell you, I'm rich. I don't worry about food. I don't worry about paying my bills. I make a fair salary. If I want to go travel, I've gone travelling. I have won the [proverbial] lottery, and I tell my students that. I have won the lottery and I am very, very lucky.

So, from my point of view, I think it helps ground me to know that there is a whole other generation coming up that have dreams of getting out and dreams of doing better. That's okay to support them in that because that's the dream that I had.

It is from this personal context that Christine shaped her approach and response to students. Her understanding of students' experiences is an extension of her own experience. Because of this viewpoint, Christine was compelled to work with students in way that fit with her own experience—giving students “a chance.” She wanted to provide her students with the same chances—the same opportunities and supports—that her teacher provided to her when she was navigating education in the midst of her own life's complexities.

Regina's comments provide a slightly different perspective on the fit of empathetic experiences with working with under-prepared students. Unlike other participants who recalled empathetic moments from their childhood or their youth, Regina recalled an empathetic moment that occurred after she had been working with under-prepared students for several years. Regina described her interaction with students during her first years of teaching as fairly rigid in terms of her boundaries and her expectations. Then, she and her family were told that her young daughter likely had a learning disability. Processing what this information about her daughter meant for her

and her family shifted her understanding of working with under-prepared students. She shared:

All of a sudden I have this much more personal world view about what “under-prepared” is, and it’s grown my empathy for all the students who come into my office, but especially for this group of students who may have come in through... we have different doors that students come into our college with, and some of those are special learning programs. And they are all still supposed to obtain the same standards over time, but some get additional support; some students are on the college version of IEP [Individualized Education Program]. So that shift in my personal life really... now I definitely feel more... like, when I look at my daughter, her name is Lucy, when I think about how I am interacting with students I think about how I want people in the future to interact with Lucy. And she is probably not college bound. We are still getting to know who she is, but if she were to make it to college, I would so want people to understand her background and to provide extra support to help her succeed. So that has really shifted, too, for me.

Regina’s recollection of this empathetic moment and how it fits with her current experience with students emphasized the timeless quality of recalling compelling moments. Whether the recalled moments are from one’s youth or from a few months ago, social work educators’ personal histories provide context by which they understand their work with under-prepared students.

While interviewing participants, these empathetic and compelling moments showed up spontaneously, almost as if describing experiences with students inspired an intuitive response from within participants. The more deeply participants discussed their recollections of working with students, the more easily these recollections of personal experiences seemed to emerge. This spontaneous and natural recollection provided evidence that educators’ personal histories are imbedded in their current work with students, that these histories cannot be removed or separated from their present-day work.

Social work educators' understanding of their current work is inextricably tied to their past.

Before Regina shared her story about her daughter above, she was talking about the external pressures from her university on her social work department. She abruptly transitioned to her daughter by saying, "I will add another dimension to this, too, which is personal... and this is a little off your particular question, but is it okay if I take off on this?" On the surface, the external pressures from university administrators seemed completely unrelated to Regina hearing that her daughter may have a learning disability, but Regina was conveying an empathetic experience for how external pressure might affect the every-day experiences for under-prepared students and her work with those students. Her recollection of her daughter provided a personal context for that empathy.

While Regina seemed to be aware of her transition from her work with students to her experiences outside of teaching, other participants offered more stream-of-consciousness comments. For example, as Nora described her experience with a particular student, she lost sight of the initial prompt and seemed naturally inclined to tell her personal story. She said:

One more thing... I don't know what your question is anymore, but my family... my parents were educated, but my dad was a pastor and at that time he didn't get a lot of money and we had a lot of kids in my family, so I think I kind of grew up in a working... it felt like it was middle class even though I felt like my father's salary was less than a lot of the factory workers in the area, but anyhow, at the time, this was... so, I had a good education until I got to high school, and then we moved and I went to an inner-city school and very diverse. I was one of the very few white kids there and that gave me a really good understanding of a different kind of life for kids. It was for the three years of high school. I really didn't learn anything academically and then I went to a high school, I mean to a college where people were pretty prepared and had lots of privilege and it really hit me in the face and I got barely "C's" my first semester at college. So I can understand... I had good education until high school and

then I didn't have education... like it really just hit me in the face. So, part of me understands what it's like for those students to be underprepared, but I know they had it way worse than I did because I always had a good education until I was... through ninth grade. And if I only had that kind of high school education with my education all along, virtually I don't know how I could have managed college because you just didn't learn the things that other people had learned.

Maintaining focus on an initial prompt was unimportant to the study; in fact, participants' natural flow of thoughts was preferable over a strict adherence to answering a specific question. It was hoped that the most salient experiences would emerge through conversation about participants' work with under-prepared students, and it seemed as if participants' comments frequently unfolded in a stream-of-consciousness way, especially as participants became more comfortable during the interviews. With this in mind, Nora's transitioning between experiences with students and experiences with her high school teachers was unremarkable. However, participants consistently transitioned from a focus on interactions with students into recollections of childhood or familial experiences. These historic recollections were imbedded in the experience of working with under-prepared students. Educators used these historical experiences as context for understanding their current experiences with students and for understanding potential future experiences. This intuitive transitioning suggested the underlying link between social work educators' personal histories and their present day work with under-prepared students.

Validating experiences. While most of the interview content focused on the complexities of working with under-prepared students and the often challenging nature of that experience, participants also recalled moments when the work was especially rewarding. For the current study, these moments were called validating experiences, or

moments when participants experienced a sense of fulfillment by upholding professional standards and perceiving that their work with students directly contributed to the success of students. Students' successes included progressing through a social work program or graduating from the program, but also included students overcoming barriers to academic progress, students serving clients well in professional practice after graduation, or students becoming role models for family members or the community. Like empathetic experiences above, validating experiences fit in a personally meaningful way with the educators' ongoing experience of working with under-prepared students—historical validating experiences are imbedded in current experiences with students. Recalling these validating experiences simultaneously became projected experiences, meaning that these recollections helped educators to envision potential futures and how their work with students could play out over time. Both the recalling of experience and the projecting forward of the experience helped educators make sense of their present-day work with under-prepared students.

Recalling validating moments emerged in the midst of discussing the often wearing experience of day-to-day work with under-prepared students. Validating moments almost sounded like intermittent pep-talks intended to bolster an educator's sense of courage or endurance. During Maggie's interview, she began to discuss teaching a full course load, attending committee meetings, working toward publishing, and then carving out time to work with under-prepared students who needed additional support. When asked what it was like for her to face all of these demands on her time and attention, she said:

Well, in the moment, it's exhausting. But, it's really... again, I've been at this 28 years, and not every student [takes the opportunity to work with me

individually outside of class]. Some students decide that they're just going to stay at a poor level. But the students who decide they want to improve, it's really rewarding because you know that not only are they getting through the program, but you're producing professionals that are going to be professionals that are going to serve people well. Those are things that really matter to me; it's why I'm teaching. I really loved being a social worker, and I care really deeply that vulnerable people get very good service. I know it's really easy to just give good service or adequate service, and that's not why I'm teaching.

The recollection of students who took advantage of the additional resources that Maggie offered and who then graduated and served clients well refueled Maggie's sense of purpose. This past validating experience set the context for her current work and also projected a potential experience for work with future students.

Validating experiences often showed up as rewarding experiences—recollections that provided educators with a sense of accomplishment. Recalling the investment of extra time and effort, and perceiving that the time and effort resulted in students' successes was perceived as rewarding for the educator. This type of validating experience showed up throughout the interview data. During Gayle's interview, she discussed the extra time and effort spent with under-prepared students. She began by saying:

I would say that our approach over here in social work is to be much more engaged than many. We're probably about as engaged with students one-on-one, who are struggling to be prepared for college, as any department. Having said that, I'm not sure that we're succeeding any better than anybody else, we're just putting in more hours. And isn't that a frustrating thing?

Gayle was then asked what it was like to hear herself describe that experience. She replied:

I'm reminding myself not to get bogged down in the failures and to think about the student who just about dropped out a couple of times, graduated from here, got herself a really kick-butt job in [the city] and is now enrolled in the Master's program—[the student] that we weren't sure we

should take into the major cause there were too many issues. So, you know, they can do it.

In the middle of recounting the trials associated with working with under-prepared students, recalling a validating experience helped to contextualize those trials within the larger scope of the work and offered the potential of a fulfilling experience. Similarly, when Douglas was asked how he would describe the experience of working with under-prepared students to a new colleague who was just starting to teach, he replied, “Frustrating but rewarding.” He then restated many of the frustrating experiences that we had discussed earlier in the interview—students having had three years of English courses but who are unable to compose a full sentence, students having passed all the required math courses but who cannot calculate a mean average in a research course, etc. However, he ended with the following:

But when you see a student who came in to you under-prepared or unprepared and you work with that student and they recognize that they’re unprepared and they’re willing to do what it takes to get prepared—and that may mean supplemental tutoring and additional meetings with that student, and helping them and sitting down with them after you grade every paper and talking to them—but working through that and getting them to a place where you feel comfortable with them going out to practice, and you feel like they’re going to be okay and you feel like they’re prepared, that’s the rewarding part. So frustrating, but potentially rewarding.

Social work educators who are working with under-prepared students remind themselves of the potential for rewarding experiences. By recalling these validating experiences, the frustrating experiences become linked to the fulfilling experiences, and past experiences become linked to present and future experiences.

Validating experiences do not solely equate students’ successes with students’ academic achievements. Again, validating experiences were personally meaningful to

social work educators and were imbedded within their ongoing experience of working with under-prepared students. Although students' academic success could be recalled as validating, other student outcomes also validated educators' work. When asked how his day-to-day work with an under-prepared student unfolded, Julian described working with a student over a semester to improve her writing. This student, whom Julian first described as embarrassed by her grades in his course, ended up winning an award given to an outstanding Bachelor of Social Work student. Julian then recalled his experience of seeing this student accept her award. He said:

So I go to the award ceremony and she is there with her husband, her two daughters, everybody is dressed up. The pride was just oozing out of her and it also was kind of cool to look at her daughters and know that she's changing their future as well by going back in her 30's, getting her degree—she may be 40, I'm not sure how old she is, maybe late 30's—but she's setting an example for them and it was just one of the most joyful experiences I've had in this role teaching.

Although Julian's recollection includes the student's academic success, it was more meaningful to him to see the student take pride in herself and to see her become a role model for her daughters. Nora, too, recalled a validating experience that was meaningful to her that focused on an aspect other than the student's academic success. She talked about her work with an under-prepared student who came from a potentially isolated and underserved community. After Nora described the frustrations that occurred during her work with this student, she then recalled how much excitement she experienced at the thought of this student returning to her community to practice. She said:

So, we're graduating a student who can make really unique contributions and promote social justice for our whole society. So I'm happy to help students, white students like me who have privilege to go and do important things—that's great, but bigger, I think, societal change can happen when we can lift people up and allow them to develop and use their abilities, and then the changes that they make can make to society are

just amazing, they can make amazing changes. I have Native American students who plan to go back to their reservations and what they can do with their knowledge and their experience, and also their self-monitoring because, of course, you can get triggered when you've had those experiences yourself, but they're aware of those things and they can go back and make changes in their reservation. White people can't do that, so we've been able to afford that student to do that. Like, that's an amazing thing if our program can contribute one or two students even a year to going back to their own communities or similar vulnerable communities, that's worth it. That's worth all of our salaries and all the things that we do to make those changes.

The potential influence of this student on future social work clients seemed to stand out for Nora. These types of recollections of how an educator's contributions fostered a student's influence on his or her family or community emerged as meaningful and compelling experiences. These recollections made the often difficult work with under-prepared students worth the extra time and effort to educators. They also fueled the educators' work with future students.

Recalling validating experiences was not dependent on student successes.

Participants also recalled validating experiences that reflected their ethical approach to their work and their preservation of professional standards. Like the recollections associated with students' academic successes, these recollections of professional behavior also contextualized and energized the educators' work with students. For example, after Douglas said that his work was rewarding when he saw students work hard, use the support he provided, and graduate from the program, he was asked what it was like for him when students did not progress through the program despite his best efforts. He said:

Even in that [moment] it can be rewarding in the sense that you know that you did what was right. You know that you, if this person wasn't prepared to do their academic work then there is a pretty good chance that they weren't prepared to go out and intervene in somebody's life. So you have to think about it both ways, you can't just think about it one way. In that way it becomes, you did what needed to be done. Your job as a...yeah,

you may be a faculty member, but you are a social work professional. Above all, you have to stick to those values and the code of ethics talks about confidence and additional training and education, things like that. That's what you are bound by and if you always lean on those values then even when it doesn't go good it can still be rewarding. Something was won. There is one student—[this] student earned an F in my research class. Came back and took it the next year, earned a D in my research class. To this day—that was two or three years ago—to this day this student and I have a very good relationship. She came to me and said, 'Thank you for not letting me slide by,' because it helped her recognize some things personally in her life. So she went in and she did some CNA stuff and now she's a CNA and she's doing well. But had I just let her slide, then it wouldn't... [it] might not have turned out like that. So, even when you are [frustrated], it can still be rewarding.

Douglas' recollection of "doing right" did not result in the under-prepared student's progression through the social work program, but it still validated his work with the student. In the midst of a frustrating experience, a validating experience was recalled that helped Douglas understand the frustrating experience in light of a larger context.

Whether recalling students' successes or recalling a sense of fulfillment from upholding professional standards, historical validating experiences help educators create meaning from their work with under-prepared students. Historical validating experiences are imbedded in current experiences with students—the meaning created from current experiences is a unified blend—a whole—of historic, current, and potential future experiences. Recalling these validating experiences also extends them into the future in that these recollections help educators to envision how their work with students could play out over time. Both the recalling of validating experiences and the projecting forward of validating experiences helped educators make meaning from their day-to-day work with under-prepared students.

Theme summary. Recalling validating experiences and empathetic experiences can intersect, suggesting the deeper underlying structure of recalling historical

experiences that create meaning in the present and help shape an understanding of future work. For example, at the end of Carmen's interview, she was asked if there was anything else that she wanted share about her experience of working with under-prepared students. She began her response with some of the challenges that are encountered in the work, and then recalled both empathetic and validating moments as a way to contextualize the work for me. She said:

I would say that in my experience you have to invest a lot and you have to be patient, but it can be very rewarding. Just, I mean, when I think about some of the students and, as I said, how rough around the edges they were initially in terms of their academic skills, maybe even things like their social skills, like how to interview—showing up with their nicest clothes, which are what they go to the bars in—and it's like, That's not going to work for an interview. Let's figure out a way that you can, you know, acquire some professional looking clothes.

So to me it's like it's one of the... the transformation, I guess that's it, the transformation that you can see if we invest the right kinds of resources—and it's not just us, but the institution that we work in—if we invest the right kinds of resources, the transformation we can see is astounding. I mean, it's just astounding and those students are going to remember us, you know. We will be the faculty members who made a difference for them because we saw something in them.

And for me it's like... I just hope every student has that experience with at least one person as they go through their academic career. I mean, I can think about ... I think about the people I had going back to grade school, you know, the teachers who made a difference for me and in high school and in college. And, I mean, I can tell you their names and I can tell you what subjects they taught. And in my master's degree program and in my doctoral program that... You know, I think we all have those experiences and I think that we have to make sure that students who come in perhaps under-prepared also have those experiences of a faculty member who made a difference for them, you know, who saw their value and their worth and their skills and was willing to help them polish things up.

Carmen's recollection of validating experiences—the transformations in students that she observed during her previous work with under-prepared students—and of empathetic experiences—the support she received from grade school, high school, and college

educators—helped Carmen create meaning from her present day work with under-prepared students. Recalling these compelling moments—validating and empathetic experiences—provided context for social work educators to understand current experiences, helped them envision potential futures, and fortified them to continue their work. Although these compelling moments are historic, they are also timeless in that they are imbedded in the current lived experience of educators and are projected forward into potential lived experiences. They form an underlying structure from which educators build meaning from their work with under-prepared students.

Demonstrating Care In and Out of the Classroom

Working with under-prepared students becomes meaningful for social work educators in the care that is developed for and is shown to individual students both in and out of the classroom. For the purpose of this research, care was defined as experiencing an interest in and a concern for a student's well-being, and demonstrating care was defined as words said and actions taken that are intended to outwardly express the experience of care and to promote a student's wellbeing. Defining the concept of care as found in the literature is complicated (see Benner, 1994) and goes beyond the scope of this research. However, after reading through the interview data, participants' comments were used to form the definitions of care and demonstrating care as stated above—participants repeatedly expressed concern for under-prepared students, and participants' actions, as they described them, were intended to promote the well-being of under-prepared students. The following section discusses participants' experiences that revealed how social work educators experience and demonstrate care for under-prepared students.

Although care was expressed for all under-prepared students, in general, participants' demonstrations of care most often focused on individual students. As mentioned in this chapter's introduction, participants' discussions about working with individual students was tonally different—weightier and more earnest—than their discussions about groups of students. Care that was focused on an individual student was important to the overall experience of working with under-prepared students because stories of demonstrating care were also stories of educators adapting their standard approaches intended for the general population of students so that they could better respond to an individual student's circumstances. It was not interpreted nor suggested that the participants, or social work educators in general, disregard rules or policies set by their educational institution or program, although that might occur. Social work educators demonstrate care for students by negotiating an individualized approach with a student for whom they experience a sense of care—they become familiar with personal details about the student's life, they spend additional time tutoring or mentoring the student outside of the classroom, they directly facilitate connections with resources for the student, and they adapt course or classroom approaches that they believe will contribute to the student's well-being. Further discussion and a few examples of how demonstrating care shows up as developing personal relationships with students, mentoring or tutoring students outside of the classroom, and negotiating individualized approaches to students for the benefit of individual students are offered below.

Personal relationships. Demonstrating care includes getting to know students in a personal way—recognizing that students' academic experience is created by more than academic pursuits in the classroom. Working with under-prepared students entails

understanding their lived-experience, and students share their lived-experience when educators demonstrate interest in and concern for the students' overall well-being.

Demonstrating care by getting to know students in a personal way may be the core of work with under-prepared students. When asked about how he would describe his experience with under-prepared students, Alejandro described it as “work.” He was asked to clarify what he meant by “work.” He said:

So I go where they are, try to understand what's on their mind, that sort of thing, and then build from there so that they get engaged and have a desire to learn. I have to get to know the individual. I have to get to know the class of students I'm dealing with and then work from there in terms of where they need to get to in my class, and that takes effort. I mean, I can't just pull out the lecture I gave three years ago and lay it on them and assume they're learning. I have to understand what's on their minds, what's going on in the world right now that might be relevant to them, upsetting them, whatever.

From his response, the “work” was interpreted as getting to know the students in personal ways so he could adapt his approach in meaningful ways for the students—in essence, demonstrating care.

Nora discussed how she demonstrates care in class. During our interview, Nora said that she was committed to students' success. She was asked what that looked like—if someone were following her during her day with students, how would that person know that she was committed to students' success? She said:

Well, if you went to class with me, you could see that I know the students' names, even when I first meet the students. I'm really bad at names, but I force myself to play name games with the students so I know the names. I would ask a student about something that they had... that was going on [with them, like, Are you] feeling better, or How did that test go, or Were you able to go visit your mom last weekend? So I know the students personally and I'll just make little comments like that. In class, definitely, we have a lot of non-traditional students that have [life] experience, so we want to bring in their ideas, and so I'm not exactly sure what I do, but I make it so students can offer up their experiences and their perspectives so

most students feel like they're an important part of the class and part of that is the culture that I foster. I'm not sure, really, how I do that, but I really care about the students and they know that, not only me but my colleagues, too... I know them all by name and face... I know that my colleagues know them, they're all known. We're trying to help them grow in all kinds of ways and if things are going fine, [my colleagues and I] don't particularly talk about them. But when there are concerns, we do—together—we talk about it and try to figure out what we can do to make it work better for the student.

By knowing students' names and asking them about their individual circumstances—illnesses, a test in another course, visiting family—Nora demonstrated care for her students.

Offering a similar account, Gayle suggested that this type of care distinguishes social work educators from other faculty members. She said:

...I think the other thing you might see that would separate me from say, a math professor is that I do maybe a little bit more asking about how their encountering their social environment. It's not just if... for me, with advising, it's not as much just, Hey, how are you doing in my class? Are you passing your other classes? You'd also probably hear me saying, Are you getting along with your roommate? Is your job being flexible enough to allow you to get your studying in? What social activities are you doing? You know, How are you relaxing?

For social work educators, understanding students' overall context—their day-to-day lived experience—is essential to educators' work. Getting to know students as individuals is a taken-for-granted experience—it is what social work educators do in their work with under-prepared students.

Without developing a personal relationship with students, social work educators would not be able to work with under-prepared students in the ways that they consider to be fulfilling. Social work educators genuinely want under-prepared students to be well, academically and otherwise, and only by knowing students in personal ways can

educators fulfill the underlying desire to help students be well. Carmen's experience provides an example. She said:

So, for example, if you have a first generation student who lives in [the city], you know, her family's from [there] but she's down here... and the family is in constant crisis... and this is a real student that I'm thinking of right now who, this happened a couple of years ago, and so she was missing Monday classes like regularly. And so, we called her in... it's like, she's a bright student doing well, but missing all these classes. And it came out that she was going home every weekend because she's the stability in the family, and she was going home every weekend to try to help her family deal with whatever the crisis of the week was and then rushing back here, and so frequently she would miss Monday classes because the crises sort of bubble over to Monday.

And, you know, [we tried] helping her to figure out how to help her family find resources in [the city] so that she didn't have to be running home every weekend. And she recognized what it was doing to her because it was really causing her to suffer academically. And then, if I remember correctly, she decided ... because we said, 'You could transfer to [another] campus if that would be easier.' And she said, 'No, I really am trying to be separate from my family, and so that would actually make things worse.'

So, you know, I think that unless you have a relationship with a student, a student is not going to reveal that kind of [situation]... because that's, particularly in her culture, considered very private. I mean, she didn't go into a lot of detail about what the crises were, but it was very private to share that [her] family is in crisis and [she is] the one who has to go home and help them solve these... I mean, you don't tell people outside the family that that's what's going on. So, it really helped us understand what the challenge was, you know, what she was trying to balance, and then we could help her figure out, okay, How can you start being a loving daughter but distance yourself a little bit so that you can take care of yourself?

Carmen recognized that without a personal relationship with the student mentioned above, she would have been unable to demonstrate care in meaningful ways to the student. And, although the support focused on helping the student respond to familial issues, ultimately Carmen's work helped the student academically. For social work

educators, demonstrating care by developing personal relationships is fundamental to the experience of working with under-prepared students.

Knowing the contexts that influence a student's experience creates new perceptions—new understandings—of students for educators. These understandings create meaning by which educators gauge their responses to students. Knowing students as individuals and the current contexts in which they live creates options for educators to interpret students' behaviors and options for how educators might respond to those behaviors. Carmen's comments show how knowing about students' lives can influence perspective:

...I think we have to be careful about jumping to assumptions, you know, about people. When I've... you know, there's this not unusual problem of students falling asleep in class, and sometimes it's the more under-prepared students who are doing this. And I learned early on to not... don't assume just because it's a young person that it's because they've been out at the bars at night. Most of the time when I really checked it out, like [saying], I've noticed you were having trouble staying awake in class. Is there something going on? It was either, I was up all night with a sick friend. I'm working two jobs and I get off at 2:00 a.m., and just the life circumstances that many of the students who are under-prepared [experience]. I mean, not only are they under-prepared, but they're also trying to do a lot to stay in school—working a lot of hours, and sometimes it's very odd hours because they're trying to put together enough money to put food on the table. We started a food pantry here a few years ago because we found out that some of our students were falling asleep because they hadn't had anything to eat. God, so... you know... it's just hard to learn [when you're hungry.] And I've actually talked about that on campus with the Dean of Students Office, that if we're going to have students, particularly first generation students, who don't have the family, financial, or kind of social supports that a lot of our other students have, then we need to figure out some ways of providing those supports on campus and not stigmatizing them.

Carmen's interest in and concern for students allowed her to interpret students' behavior—falling asleep—in the context of the demands on under-prepared students while they are trying to complete a degree. This interpretation also opened up options for

Carmen to respond, in this case to demonstrate care—starting a food pantry and advocating to the Dean—actions intended to promote the well-being of students, academically and otherwise. Opening up options for responding to students is connected to understanding what is meaningful to students’ day-to-day lives, and understanding students’ day-to-day lives is only possible by knowing students in a personal way.

Time outside of the classroom. In addition to getting to know students as individuals, demonstrating care entails time spent on tutoring and mentoring students outside of the classroom. Under-preparation often shows up when students do not meet the academic expectations of educators—poorly written papers, low test scores, under-supported ideas, etc. For under-prepared students to succeed, they need additional support outside of the classroom, and interview participants repeatedly described spending additional time with students to practice and to study course-related material. Carmen described her experience with one student who struggled with writing papers and supporting her ideas. She said:

And so we would make an appointment, she would come into my office and we would sit down. She would have copies of research articles, you know, of other things totally... just like, not even a neat stack of paper... just totally in disarray, and we would sit down and systematically go through, and figure out, okay, What is it that you want to say? Let's develop an outline. Where do you have support for the points that you want to make? And we would ... and I didn't do it for her, I was just kind of guiding her through that process.

Christine offered a similar account of her experience with a student:

I can remember phone conversations as [the student] would send a paper to me; phone conversations on Saturdays and Sundays, working things through and saying, Okay, what's wrong with this sentence? How can you make it stronger? Or, This isn't a sentence, why isn't it a sentence? Or, This is passive voice. Why is it passive voice? Or, This just doesn't make sense, I don't know what you're trying to say, and allow her to talk it out

to the point where she finally got some handle on what she was trying to say and could try to put it in a clearer manner.

Then, Gayle's comments suggested that giving extra time and attention is essential to the experience of working with under-prepared students even when resources other than the educator might be available for students. Gayle said:

I guess the other piece that I'm reminded of is, we can make referrals 'til we're blue in the face, but sometimes just referring students to the academic support center or just referring somebody to counseling isn't good enough. You know, sometimes [you have to] go the extra mile and listen for a while or [say], Hey, let's just sit down and outline that paper together. Or, let's sit down and read through that problem that you're struggling with. I hope that other faculty [members] remind themselves that there may be supports available, but sometimes we're the support, to the extent we can anyway.

Spending time with students outside of the classroom to work on concepts and skills that they find challenging is part of the everyday experience of working with under-prepared students. As previously discussed in the responsibility dimension section, this type of one-on-one effort is not possible with every student who might need it. However, working one-on-one with students, often multiple students during a course, is one way that social work educators demonstrate care toward under-prepared students.

Negotiating individual circumstances. In addition to extra time and effort tutoring and mentoring students, negotiating approaches developed for all students to address an individual students' situation also exemplified demonstrating care.

Negotiating differing responses to students based on students' individual circumstances fits Nodding's (2013) idea of care where the care shown varies depending on a particular set of circumstances. Again, this study does not suggest that social work educators disregarded institutional or programmatic policies; rather, it was found that participants negotiated an approach to a student's circumstances that intended to promote that

student's well-being while respecting the overarching guidance provided by policies.

Maggie offered an example of how an educator negotiates general approaches in response to a student's individual circumstances. When asked to tell more about how she understood her role with under-prepared students, Maggie initially responded by describing how she tries to support all students during the often overwhelming experience of entering higher education for the first time. She then shared about an individual student with whom she worked:

So, for me I see my job as an educator as both meeting students where they are, but not leaving them there—giving them the option to grow, and being really enthusiastic when that happens. I think about a student who came from the associate degree program last year and handed in her first paper to me and it was miserable. So she got a bad grade, and just coming in and saying to her, Look, these are the things that I really appreciate about what you've done, and I can tell in class you have some great ideas. So what is going on here? So we had a conversation about what was going on there, and again, she was somebody who I gave an option to rewrite her paper, and I would grade it again at 85%. And I have a second paper in that class, so the next paper she wrote for me, she got an A, which was what she really cared about.

The thing that mattered to me more, the next semester her husband had some amazingly terrible [medical] situations, and he is now on disability. She was just going through some really hard times, and this is during the time where she is supposed to be writing this 30 page paper for me. We were able to stay in touch. We negotiated how she was going to finish the semester. I gave her an extra three months, so she wrote the paper over the summer. So we were able to negotiate her life so that she could keep on, and then just really encouraging her [saying,] "These are the things I see about you that are going to make you a really good social worker. You are in the midst of really difficult times, so how are we going to manage this?"

The way Maggie negotiated a response to course policy recognized the student's whole-life experience and fostered the student's well-being. Maggie honored the course policy of rewriting papers for 85% of a grade, but was not rigid with assignment due dates. She demonstrated care for the student by negotiating an extension for writing a final paper

that accommodated the student's responsibilities for her husband's care. Negotiating course policies is one way that social work educators demonstrate care.

Another way that social work educators demonstrate care is by negotiating programmatic policies. Sheryl's experience with an under-prepared student offered an example of negotiating programmatic policy as a demonstration of care. Sheryl was asked to tell a story about working with an under-prepared student, and to describe how that work unfolded. Sheryl's story included her advocacy to her department chair on behalf of the student:

I actually had a student that I ended up working one-on-one with because she had plagiarized, and in coming up with a response to the plagiarism I worked out with my department head an alternative response to failing her in the course, because the rule was if somebody plagiarized they were going to fail the class. But I felt like she plagiarized because she really didn't know what she was doing and this was one of those students who had never written a paper before coming to college. When you're in your freshman English classes and you're writing papers for freshman English, you're not doing a lot of citations. You're not doing a lot of like a real research paper for English class. And I really felt like she had a brain in her head. She could think. Verbally she was fairly engaged in class, but there was a huge disconnect between her verbal and her written work. And working with her individually I was able to see that she really had goals. She really had an idea of what she wanted to do in life; that she just didn't know how to get there and that no one in her family had ever been to college.

She was from a fairly poor family in [an impoverished and under-resourced neighborhood], just so that you have a little background about where she comes from. And we met, I guess, every week or every two weeks in my office to review the work she was doing, to review any writing. I almost became like a tutor if you will, but I really worked intensively with her to be able to get her up to where she needed to be. I had to almost teach her how to think critically. She could form an argument to some degree, but integrating material was difficult for her. But I think as we were able to talk one-on-one more about issues, she was able to learn how to integrate more information. I think a lot of these kids tend to be linear as opposed to more integrative, so I think that one-on-one tutorial was very helpful to her. And the increased writing requirement and having me go through a paper with her sitting there and my saying,

Okay, you said this but it's not cited. Why? Okay, here's what we need to do, or, These sentences require periods or commas, that sort of thing... so, just some of that one-on-one teaching her with her own work I think was helpful to her.

She's actually gone on and she's doing beautifully now. She actually went to graduate school and she's doing fine. But she... I remember feeling particularly frustrated with the plagiarism-cheating aspect of things, [but also] feeling as if there was something else there that we could work with, and I think it was rewarding to be able to work with her one-on-one.

Sheryl's story provided an example of how social work educators demonstrate care by negotiating programmatic policies. Sheryl demonstrated interest in and concern for the student by advocating on the student's behalf, negotiating an individualized response to the student's circumstances, and then working one-on-one with the student to develop the academic skills to meet programmatic expectations, all of which were rooted in Sheryl's intuitive sense of the student's potential and in getting to know the student in a personal way. Social work educators demonstrate care toward under-prepared students by negotiating individualized responses to programmatic policies that are generalized to all students.

Theme summary. Individualizing policy responses to a student's circumstances, spending one-on-one time outside of the classroom to tutor or mentor students, and developing personal relationships with students are all examples of demonstrating care for under-prepared students. Working with under-prepared students becomes meaningful for social work educators when they develop care for students and demonstrate that care to students. Care was defined as experiencing an interest in and a concern for a student's well-being, and demonstrating care was defined as words said and actions taken that are intended to outwardly express the experience of care and promote a student's well-being.

Although care was expressed for all students, participants' most often demonstrated care through words and actions that were tailored to an individual student and that student's circumstances. This individualization, in itself, demonstrates care (Nodding, 2013), and is a taken-for-granted experience for social work educators who work with under-prepared students.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) and the results of the primary research question: How do social work educators make sense of the experience of working with under-prepared students? Two underlying, secondary questions imbedded in the primary research question included: "How do social work faculty members understand their role or work?" and "How does this work become meaningful in context with under-prepared students?" Four overlapping themes that answered these questions were identified including understanding under-preparation as social injustice, questioning what it means to be a social work educator, recalling compelling moments, and demonstrating care in and out of the classroom. Themes were presented in no particular order. These four themes represent the most salient taken-for-granted experiences of social work educators who are working with under-prepared students, and that these themes reveal how social work educators come to understand their role and make meaning from their work.

Chapter V: Discussion, Limitations, and Implications

Discussion

The following section discusses the analysis results in the context of existing literature. Connecting results to existing literature follows Smith et al.'s (2009) Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method and clarifies how the research results enhance the knowledge base related to social work educators working with under-prepared students. As previously discussed, the historical contributions to under-preparation are not expected to be changed through education at the post-secondary level, but social work education can adapt approaches with students that will improve their academic performance and skill attainment. Refining educators' approaches requires a new understanding of the experiences of under-prepared students and especially a new understanding of the entire system with which students interact. Understanding the experience of social work educators who work with students on a daily basis is critical to understanding this larger system and can uncover larger systemic issues—the everyday interactions, events, and decisions—that influence baccalaureate social work (BSW) education. Educators influence students' ability to adapt to academic norms (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Pinto & Francis, 2005), influence the network of relationships formed by students (Wilcox et al., 2005; Wilks & Spivey, 2010), control the teaching strategies used in the classroom (Gabriel, 2008; Kember, 2009), and develop educational policies specific to BSW programs (Dillon, 2007; Tam & Coleman, 2009). As the social work profession charges its members with understanding a system before changing that system (Council on Social Work Education, 2008b, EP 2.1.4), we must better understand the experience of social work educators before BSW programs can adapt their approaches

with under-prepared students. With this in mind, the focus of this discussion is to uncover how each theme enhances our understanding of the literature on working with under-prepared social work students.

Understanding under-preparation as social injustice. The results of this study suggest that social work educators perceive under-preparation for college as evidence of historic social injustice experienced by under-prepared students, and this perception creates a framework that helps social work educators understand how their personal values might intersect with their teaching role—working with under-prepared students presents the educator with an opportunity to act upon their value to foster social justice. Motivation for working with students increases when an educator’s personal beliefs align with the contextual factors of teaching (Dybowski & Harendza, 2014; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). For social work educators, the perception that under-preparation is evidence of social injustice may create a context in which the educator can act upon their personal and professional values, and so their perceptions of historic injustices toward students may fuel their work with those students.

An educator’s motivation may rely in part on the value that an educator places on a given activity (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). The participants in this study placed high-value on promoting social justice, and opportunities to promote social justice with under-prepared students energized their work. Seeing one’s self as a change agent called to enact justice and highly valuing that role motivates social work educators to consider how their work with under-prepared students might foster social justice. A formal, structured example of how this perception leads to action may be the development of the Minority Fellowship Program (MFP) that provided financial support and social

networking opportunities to minority students pursuing doctoral degrees in social work. Pinto and Francis (2005) suggest that the development of the MFP stemmed from the profession's mission to advance social justice for all people, especially historically marginalized populations. The same concept may apply to the day-to-day interactions that social work educators have with under-prepared students. An educator's commitment to advance social justice may motivate his or her work with an individual student who is perceived to have been historically marginalized.

This perception also creates options for educators to interpret or reinterpret under-prepared students' behavior (Dybowski & Harendza, 2014). Dybowski and Harendza (2014) state, "the teachers who consider the perspective of their students and attribute student behavior to external factors might experience less of a negative impact on their motivation for teaching when they come across 'undisciplined' or 'disrespectful' behavior" (p. 399). The perception that the students' behavior stems from historical inequities provides a framework for educators to understand the students and how the educator might respond to the student's behavior. Students' current understandings of how to navigate higher education might not include an awareness of expectations considered common among college students, faculty, and staff. A student who turns in an assignment late might be defying common expectations for classroom behavior, or, if his high-school teachers consistently gave him passing grades despite consistently late assignments, he might understand the timeliness of assignments as inconsequential, and then use that understanding in the college classroom. For a social work educator who understands the student's behavior—his under-preparation—as a manifestation of prior injustices rather than defiance of common expectations, the response to the student will

likely include a compensation for this historic injustice—helping the student to understand the expectation of timely assignments.

As social worker and academic Eduard Lindeman (1926/1989) wrote, education should enhance learners' ability "to be intelligent about the things that happen to us" (p. 4). Participants in this study attempted to live out this perspective, especially for under-prepared students. The perception of student's historic social injustices fueled social work educators' desire to build under-prepared students' ability to navigate social interactions and apply knowledge in everyday situations, what Elias and Merriam (2005) called "practical wisdom" (p. 28). The educators' focus on the formation of practical wisdom may initially have been on academic skills—critical thinking, problem-solving, negotiating new experiences (Dzubak, 2006)—but participants viewed their work as applying more broadly to developing students both personally and professionally.

Questioning what it means to be a social work educator. Questioning what it means to be a social work educator fits with Basnett and Sheffield's (2010) findings that social work educators who fail social work students use their professional identity to make that decision and also question their identity while making that decision. Social work educators look to their professional values, their responsibility as gate-keepers to the profession, and their commitment to protecting future clients when determining whether or not a student meets the standards for competent practice. Questioning one's professional identity was especially evident when an educator failed a student without the benefit of external validation, or "verification," of their decision, such as clear support for their decision from their colleagues, their programs, or their schools. Basnett and Sheffield (2010) state, "The results indicate that [social work educators] without

verification of their decision had ongoing concerns focused around their professional identity, including their confidence as a [social work educator] and, critically, their perceived ability to uphold professional standards (p. 2132). Results of the current study support these findings—participants in the current study questioned their roles, responsibilities, and fit with colleagues when making a decision about student progress, and especially when the context of the decision was complex and clouded.

Questioning what it means to be a social work educator also mirrors Wang's (2012) idea that social work educators should be *self-reflective* educators—they should consider their personal experiences and the contexts that help shape their experience of working with students. Wang (2012) states that self-reflection “gives us the opportunity to choose to depart from the ‘everydayness’ which may help to decrease burnout” (p. 59). “Everydayness” represents Heidegger's (1927/2008) idea that thoughtless routine determines one's actions (Kreber, Klampfleitner, McCune, Bayne, & Knottenbelt, 2007). The emergence of self-reflection as a theme among participants is ironic in that this study attempted to uncover the “everydayness” of the phenomenon of working with under-prepared students, and the everydayness appears to include an experience of stepping out of that everydayness by questioning the meaning of that everydayness. However, it is unclear if participants' questioning of what it means to be a social work educator was conscious and intentional in the moment or if the questioning occurred more intuitively and obscurely in their day-to-day routine. Either way, questioning one's role and responsibilities in relation to one's identity as a social work educator is encouraged in the literature to improve one's work with students (Cranton & Carusetta, 2002; Dinkelman, 2003; McAlpine & Weston, 2002).

Role dimension. The role dimension of questioning what it means to be a social work educator supports Finch and Taylor's (2013) results of "What Is My Role Story" (p. 251), a qualitative theme they offer as one possible explanation for why social work educators have difficulty working with failing social work students. In particular, Finch and Taylor found that balancing the dual roles of supporter and evaluator caused anxiety for social work educators. Participants in the current study similarly questioned how to balance the roles of door-opener and gate-keeper. Some participants pointedly discussed these roles in terms of an educator role and a social work practitioner role, and questioned the extent to which their educator role with students should mirror a social work practitioner role with clients. Mirroring a practitioner role in the way that an educator develops relationships with students may positively benefit students in their academic progress (Rodriguez-Keyes, Schneider, & Keenan, 2013). Rodriguez-Keyes, Schneider, and Keenan (2013) state, "Our findings suggest that instructors can model social work engagement and facilitate change through the process of getting to know students... [through] the conditions social workers strive to create in relationships with clients" (p.797). Although balancing the roles of supporter/door-opener/practitioner and evaluator/gate-keeper/educator may cause anxiety for educators, a mix of both roles may well serve under-prepared students.

Responsibility dimension. One way that the responsibility dimension was expressed by participants was questioning when their responsibilities ended and students' responsibilities began. In part, this stemmed from the educators' understanding that the lack of engagement from students may be a manifestation of historical injustices experienced by the students, and so the educators anticipated taking more responsibility

to motivate students at the beginning of the process. As Regina said, “I might know that I am going to work harder in the beginning of the relationship, and that’s okay, but if that continues that would not be advantageous to the [student].” Determining when to stop “working harder” than the student presented a point of internal conflict. This internal conflict makes sense in light of Rodriguez-Keyes et al.’s (2013) findings that a reciprocal relationship exists between the educator engaging with students—expressing relational qualities and actively responding to students—and students engaging with the educator—asking questions in and out of class and participating in course-related activities. The more an educator engages with students, the more students demonstrate a willingness to engage with the educator. In this type of relationship, it may be difficult for an educator to determine how much to engage and how long to engage with students who do not readily reciprocate with engagement.

Another way that the responsibility dimension showed up for participants was in reconciling the difference between personal success and students’ success. Finch and Taylor (2013) identified a similar theme that they called “The Internalizing Failure so I Couldn’t Always Fail Them Story” (p. 252). This theme reflects moments when educators confuse their own success as educators with students’ performance or progress. Although the participants in the current study expressed an ability to differentiate between the fulfillment of personal responsibilities and students’ performance, the questioning of one’s responsibilities and the process of reconciling these differences is expressed as part of the work with under-prepared students across qualitative studies.

Collegial dimension. The collegial dimension was expressed by participants as comparing one’s perceptions and actions to those of colleagues through interaction and

feedback as a way to understand what it meant to be a social work educator. Collegial feedback and interaction, both formal and informal, repeatedly shows up in the literature as fundamental to the way educators develop their teaching practice and their approaches to students (Brazeau & Woodward, 2012; Dybowski & Harendza, 2014; Gorozidis & Papaioannou, 2014; Lam, Cheng, & Choy, 2010). Collegial support and guidance can energize educators to try new approaches with students and can bolster educators' self-confidence in their practice (Gorozidis & Papaioannou, 2014; Lam et al., 2010). Collegial support also strengthens educators' ability to cope with the internal and external consequences of failing students who do not meet the educator's minimum expectations (Basnett & Sheffield, 2010). However, educators' understandings of how to engage with students can vastly differ from one another even when those educators claim the same ideological viewpoint (O'Connor, 2008). Social work educators may decide to work with a student in a way that they know other educators will criticize, even though all of the educators claim a commitment to protecting the profession or fostering social justice. Regardless of support or criticism, participants in the current study expressed that both forms of feedback clarify their understanding of what it means for them, personally, to be a social work educator.

Recalling compelling moments. Recalling compelling moments is the recounting of empathetic and validating historical experiences that create meaning in the present and help shape an understanding of future work. Hodges and Klein (2001) define empathy as, "bridging the gap that exists between the self experience and others' experiences" (p. 438). Freedberg (2007) contends that empathy for social workers does more than bridge a gap in experiences; empathy can connect social workers with their

own experience as a way to understand their practice. Social workers must be reflective and mindful of their own experiences and how those experiences may influence their practice to create a constructive and ethical relationship with those with whom they work (Freedberg, 2007). Although Freedberg's argument focuses on a social worker's clinical practice, the argument can be applied to a social work educator's teaching practice to the extent that the teaching practice mirrors a traditional practice setting. Although participants indicated that they did not view their students as clients, participants perceived under-prepared students as client-like which suggests that, in some moments, the work with under-prepared students may mirror traditional social work practice. In this context, recalling compelling moments and being reflective about those experiences can help social work educators make sense of their current work with under-prepared students.

Englander (2007) suggests that the meaning created for individuals in historical experiences can be persistent—the meaning created in the past experiences can be re-created or revived in one's present experience. This revived meaning can influence the day-to-day activities of the individual. Englander recounts her psychological structure of lived persistent meaning as follows:

The meaning of the [recalled moment] has such an influence that the participants perceive it as a personal value forming an essential part of their lived emotional life; they have a vivid memory of what they perceive as the situation in which the acceptance of the personal value took place; they perceive the meaning of the [recalled moment] as relating to their fundamental emotional needs; they use or avoid the [recalled moment] as a strategy to deal with experiences of their personal emotional equilibrium; and they guide their daily activities and some life goals, all related in some way to the meaning of the [recalled moment]. (2007, p. 211)

Based on Englander's structure, the compelling moments recalled by social work educators were moments that helped form essential, personal values by which they navigate life. These moments, i.e., their imbedded meanings and values, help social work educators to make sense of their work with under-prepared students and guide educators' day-to-day activities.

Recalling compelling moments that helped to form personal values is also consistent with Eccles and Wigfield's (2002) idea that educators are motivated to act in accordance with their personal values. The participants in this study placed high-value on the actions of others who supported and guided their own development or the development of loved ones. Participants also expressed highly valuing the graduation of students who struggled academically and with whom they had worked. These historical moments recalled by participants provided evidence for the values that guide their current work with students. Social work educators who value supporting struggling students and contributing to students overcoming under-preparation will be motivated to act accordingly, and will prioritize activities that support the success of under-prepared students (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).

Demonstrating Care In and Out of the Classroom. The current study suggests that educators develop a sense of care for students' well-being and outwardly express this care through words or actions that are intended to promote students' well-being. Often these acts of care reflected an adaption to an educator's standard approach to better respond to an individual student's circumstances. Actions that adapt to individual students' circumstances fit Nodding's (2013) description of care:

To care is to act not by fixed rule but by affection and regard. It seems likely, then, that the actions of one-caring will be varied rather than rule-

bound; that is, her actions, while predictable in a global sense, will be unpredictable in detail. Variation is to be expected if the one claiming to care really cares, for her engrossment is in the variable and never fully understood other, in the particular other, in a particular set of circumstances. Rule-bound responses in the name of caring lead us to suspect that the claimant wants most to be credited with caring. To act as one-caring, then, is to act with special regard for the particular person in a concrete situation. We act not to achieve for ourselves a commendation but to protect or enhance the welfare of the cared-for (p. 24).

Participants in the current study seemed compelled to show this individualized approach which stemmed from developing personal relationships with students. Participants recognized that students' academic experiences created contextual influences in and out of the classroom, including experiences with friends, family, extra-curricular activities, and jobs. Understanding students' overall context—their day-to-day lived experience—was fundamental to educators' work with those students, and this was accomplished through developing personal relationships with them. Without developing a personal relationship with students, study participants would not have been able to work with under-prepared students in the ways that they considered to be fulfilling. Developing relationships with students and adapting their approach with those students seemed to be a taken-for-granted response by the social work educators—a natural expression of who they were as individuals. These results are consistent with O'Connor's (2008) findings that social workers use their identity as a social worker and their own sense of self as justification for demonstrating care in their professional work. Identifying one's self as a caring individual serves as a basis for educators' actions with students (p. 125), and serves as both burden and motivation. Working with under-prepared students is often complicated, and complicated circumstances can be draining, but the work also can be rewarding when students succeed which can motivate educators to continue their work.

Developing personal relationships was one way that participants demonstrated care. These personal relationships allowed educators to know students by name and to recognize the unique complexities faced by each student in his or her day-to-day life. This type of caring is associated with students' academic success (Rodriguez-Keyes et al., 2013). Rodriguez-Keyes et al. (2013) state, "Our findings indicate that recognition [of individual needs, qualities, and learning style], combined with the expression of relational qualities (caring, fostering connection, and helpfulness), and responsiveness, facilitate student learning and increase motivation" (p. 795). Although the current study does not focus on the experience of under-prepared students, student outcomes may help to reveal how the experience of caring for students fits with fulfilling academic responsibilities to students—a fit that participants often questioned.

Limitations

Change in participant eligibility. One limitation of the current study was a change in participant eligibility criteria. The researcher initially sought participants who were tenured at the school for which they taught; however, he decided to expand the inclusion criteria to non-tenured faculty members part way through the recruitment process to increase the number of eligible participants. Use of the tenure criterion was intended to help ensure that participants had experience with the phenomenon, but participants were able to demonstrate experience with the phenomenon in other ways, such as five or more years of teaching experience. The researcher also discovered that some schools did not award tenure but used some form of long term contract. As tenure was not fundamental to the phenomenon, that criterion was discarded in favor of

including participants who were able to communicate that they had enough experience with the phenomenon to discuss it in depth.

The initial tenure criterion was used to exclude at least four potential participants who volunteered for the study but who were not yet tenured with the school for which they taught. Once the criterion was changed to include non-tenured faculty members who had experience working with under-prepared students, the previously excluded volunteers were not reconnected. Instead, the researcher contacted potential participants with whom he had not yet confirmed eligibility. There was potential for the remaining potential participants to meet the initial criterion of tenure, and if all of these participants had met that criterion, then all participants would have consistently met all of the initial criteria. However, as several potential participants had already been excluded based on the tenure criterion, it was anticipated that other potential participants would also not meet the criterion but be able to demonstrate experience with the phenomenon. So, the researcher decided that future potential participants would be asked about tenure status, and if they did not meet that criterion but were able to demonstrate experience working with under-prepared students, then they would be included in the study.

Disproportionate sample size for time in analysis. As discussed in the methods section above, Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) suggest between four and 10 interviews as a guide for determining the scope of data collection for PhD students and less experienced researchers. For example, if two interviews were conducted with five participants, then the researcher would have completed 10 interviews—the upper limit suggested by Smith, et al. Although the total of 11 interviews conducted in the current study was close to the upper limit suggested by Smith et al., Smith et al. (2009) suggest

an estimated one month of analysis for each interview to demonstrate prolonged engagement with the research data and to promote depth in analysis. Analysis of the 11 interviews was completed in six and a half months, just over half of the time recommended by Smith et al. (2009). The comparatively high number of interviews to the amount of analysis time may prompt legitimate questions about rigor in the analysis of the current data set. However, interpretive phenomenology seeks to uncover the significance of a phenomenon through trustworthy interpretation (Leonard, 1994; Plager, 1994), and the provision of participant statements throughout the analysis section allows readers to assess whether or not the interpretation is trustworthy or fits with the data provided by research participants. Also, the description of the essential elements of the phenomenon studied is offered as *one* interpretation among other potential interpretations (Grondin, 1994) that may expand an understanding of what it means to work with under-prepared students.

Implications

Implications for social work education. Schools of Social Work and social work educators can more explicitly recognize how working with under-prepared students mirrors traditional social work practice, and more importantly, discuss how this mirrored process might affect both educators and students. This “mirrored process” seems to reflect the Council on Social Work Education’s (2008b) statement that, “through their teaching, scholarship, and service—as well as their interactions with one another, administration, students, and community—the program’s faculty models the behavior and values expected of professional social workers” (EP 3.3). Holosko et al. (2010) suggest that this policy recognizes that a program’s implicit curriculum is implemented by social

work educators in their day-to-day work with students, and acknowledges the role of social work educators in the professional socialization of students.

Social work scholars discourage social work educators from treating students as clients—focusing solely or primarily on students’ needs, especially in the application of policy or competency standards, without fully considering the consequences for future clients and the profession (Cole, 1991; Maidment & Briggs, 1998; Tam & Coleman, 2009). However, participants in the current study stated that they did not view students as clients, but rather recognized how their work with under-prepared students mirrored a traditional practice role. Participants also discussed how they consider the consequences of their work with students on both the profession and future clients. Although participants expressed distaste for the feelings that sometimes arose when failing or holding back students who did not demonstrate competency, participants prioritized their role as a gate-keeper to the profession. Schools of social work that recognize this experience among faculty members and encourage discussion about its potential implications may help educators to more clearly understand their roles and responsibilities to students, reduce their anxiety, and decrease the temptation to advance under-performing students (Finch & Taylor, 2013). Also, as some scholars found that mirroring practitioner roles with students can benefit students’ academic progress (Rodriguez-Keyes et al., 2013), a better understanding of this experience among educators may help social work programs increase these benefits.

Social work educators within a particular school or program can individually and communally explore what it means to fulfill responsibilities to the school, to the profession, and to students, and help one another understand how they assess fulfillment

of those responsibilities. Exploring these concepts is consistent with Wang's (2012) idea that social work educators should be self-reflective educators, and self-reflection may help educators form more constructive and ethical relationships with students (Freedberg, 2007). Discussing roles and responsibilities is also supported by the idea that collegial discussion and feedback help educators develop and refine their approaches with students (Brazeau & Woodward, 2012; Dybowski & Harendza, 2014; Gorozidis & Papaioannou, 2014; Lam et al., 2010). Social work educators who work with under-prepared students often experience those students as client-like and adopt practitioner-like strategies for working with those students. Recognizing this experience and supporting educators through the process of understanding their role with students and their responsibilities to students, colleagues, and the profession may help educators and their programs better respond to the complex situations often encountered when working with under-prepared students.

Social work schools can also begin to recognize the importance of educators' emotions in their work with students, and acknowledge how caring may contribute to fortifying faculty members' sense of self-as-educator and fulfillment in their work. O'Connor (2008) states, "Examining the role of emotions in the development of professional identities leads to a richer and more complete understanding of teachers' work" (p. 125). Understanding educators' work with under-prepared students, including the emotions and motivations that undergird that work, may help social work programs to help educators constructively respond to emotional dissonance or ambivalence—social work programs can create the appropriate conditions to support the intrinsic motivations that sustain educators in their work with students (Gorozidis & Papaioannou, 2014, p. 8).

Understanding the emotional experience of educators may also clarify how these emotions affect educators' assessment of students. As Finch and Taylor (2013) suggest, educators' emotional responses to students might allow students to progress through and graduate from social work programs when those students do not adequately demonstrate competency for practice. This experience is tied to educators' sense of identity and of fulfillment as a social worker and as an educator. Acknowledging and exploring these experiences may help both educators and students as social work educators adapt their work with under-prepared students and as students benefit from these adaptations

Implications for future research. This study has several implications for further study related to working with under-prepared BSW students in social work programs. First, social justice is a core value of the social work profession, and participants in this study viewed their work with under-prepared students as an opportunity to foster social justice. Although the concept of social justice for future social work clients is emphasized in social work programs, there is little attention given to what social justice looks like for students enrolled in a BSW program but who are struggling to meet the minimum expectations for college success. Concepts related to fostering social justice for students deserve further investigation. Understanding what social justice for students means to social work educators, what fostering social justice looks like in the day-to-day interactions with students, and what the perceived consequences for educators and students look like might help clarify how educators can live out this core value in their primary role as an educator in an academic setting and working with students rather than traditional social work clients.

Second, balancing roles of door-opener (advocate or supporter) and gate-keeper (evaluator or regulator) was fundamental to the experience of working with under-prepared students. Although participants in the study expressed an acceptance of conflicting roles and responsibilities as part of their work, balancing roles was also a source of anxiety, uncertainty, and fatigue. Participants did not strictly view their role as only a professional trainer or competency evaluator; much of their work focused on addressing the personal needs of students who struggled to meet academic expectations. Exploring the personal motivation of social work educators to adopt both roles, the methods they use to balance these roles in their everyday work with students, and the process of deciding between these roles when these roles are in conflict can better prepare social work programs to support educators in their work. Investigating these concepts might also uncover opportunities for schools to make programmatic changes that can support students' success and shift some of the supporter role away from individual educators. Researching the dual role of door-opener and gate-keeper might reveal ways to support both educators and students.

Another topic for further research is the fit of external influences—university or programmatic policies or priorities—on the experience of working with under-prepared students. Participants in the current study discussed some of the external influences that came to mind as they recalled their work with under-prepared students. For example, Regina said:

Something colleges are really under a lot of scrutiny about is retention and graduation rates. And so there is kind of a general pressure. I have never felt any pressure around an individual student, necessarily, other than from my immediate colleagues around graduation and stuff. But you'd have to be living in a vacuum to not know that it's important for colleges and universities to graduate the students that they let in the door.

These external pressures did not show up as an essential theme among study participants, but many participants made similar comments that external influences made already complex experiences with students more burdensome. These types of external influences such as leadership and human resources, evaluation systems, and hierarchal priorities have been found to play a prominent role in educator motivation to work with undergraduate students (Dybowski & Harendza, 2014). Related comments by participants in the current study were not explored in depth during interviews, and now present an opportunity for further investigation—how do university-wide systemic influences fit with the experience of working with under-prepared students?

Chapter Summary

The main goal of using the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method was to reveal the whole phenomenon with its supporting elements, and the previous chapter discussed the IPA results in the context of existing literature. Connecting results to existing literature clarifies how the research results enhance the knowledge base related to social work educators working with under-prepared students. The previous discussion expands the understanding of the system with which BSW students interact by uncovering how each theme—each supporting element of the experience of working with under-prepared students—relates to the current literature on working with under-prepared social work students.

The previous chapter also reviewed limitations of the study and implications of the study for social work education and future research. Limitations included changing participant eligibility criteria part way through the study and taking less than the recommended time to complete interpretive analysis. One potential drawback of the

criterion change was that potential participants may have been excluded using the initial, more restrictive criterion. However, expanding eligibility criteria to include participants who did not have tenure with their respective employing institution, but who demonstrated experience with the phenomenon was in keeping with the IPA method (Smith et al., 2009) and did not change the intent of that initial criterion.

Implications for social work education included recognizing educators' experiences as gate-keepers to the profession and help clarifying what that means in day-to-day interactions with students, promoting collegial discussion and reflection on educators' roles and responsibilities related to under-prepared students, and understanding the emotional responses and motivations experienced by educators that help them to experience fulfillment in their work with students. The ways in which social work educators foster justice for under-prepared students and how they balance door-opener and gate-keeper roles, along with the effects of external influences on educators' work, deserve further research.

Understanding the experience of social work educators who work with under-prepared students on a daily basis may reveal ways that baccalaureate social work (BSW) education can adapt its approach with under-prepared students to improve their academic performance and skill attainment. Adapting educators' approaches requires a holistic understanding of the entire system with which students interact, and social work educators are a part of and influence that larger system (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Tam & Coleman, 2009; Wilks & Spivey, 2010). The current study provides insight into some ways that might enhance the experience of social work educators and the system in which they work as they respond to the increasing number of under-prepared students seeking a

BSW degree. This study also reveals a need for further exploration of educators' experiences and of the ways social work programs might improve social justice implications for both students and the profession.

Appendix A

Research Announcement

Dear Colleagues,

My name is Rob Richardson. I am a Ph.D. candidate at the Indiana University School of Social Work. For my dissertation, I am researching how tenured social work educators make sense of working with under-prepared students in BSW programs. Undergraduate social work programs are seeing a larger number of students interested in pursuing a social work degree and who are under-prepared to meet the expectations of higher education and accreditation standards. For the purpose of this study, an under-prepared student is defined as a student whose academic performance does not meet the minimum expectations for college success and whose under-preparation may be linked to one or more experiences reflecting social or economic marginalization. Although strategies for working with under-prepared students are emerging, these strategies are often presented without the contextual experiences faced by the educators who work with under-prepared students on a daily basis, and who abide by personal, professional, and institutional expectations for faculty performance. I want to learn about these contextual experiences.

One way for me to learn more about these experiences is to interview social work educators who work with under-prepared students. Eligible interview participants must:

- a) be tenured faculty members at social work programs accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE),
- b) teach undergraduate courses, and
- c) self-identify as instructors working with under-prepared students as defined above.

Initial interviews are expected to take 60 to 90 minutes. Follow-up interviews, if needed and agreed to, will be much shorter and be used to clarify specific concepts discussed in the initial interviews. Preferably, interviews will be conducted in person. To accommodate geographic distances, web-based audio-visual software or telephone may be used, unless another format is agreed upon by both the participant and me. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed, with any identifying information changed to help protect confidentiality.

If you are interested in hearing more about this research, or if you are willing to participate and you meet the eligibility criteria above, please contact me at richardr@iupui.edu or at (317) 730-1373. I am happy to answer any questions or address any concerns. This research was approved by the Indiana University Institutional Review Board as Exempt Status.

Very sincerely,

Rob Richardson, MSW
Ph.D. Candidate
Indiana University School of Social Work

Appendix B

Interview Prompts

Researcher: I am interested in better understanding how tenured social work educators make sense of working with under-prepared students in BSW programs. I want to learn about you and your experience with under-prepared students. One way for me to learn more about your experience is for you to tell me stories—to describe your experiences as you recall them unfolding. Many of my questions will either ask you to tell me story related to the research topic, or will ask for more details related to your story. All of your responses will be kept confidential.

1. I'd like you to tell me a story [or another story] about working with an under-prepared student that you feel best captures that experience for you.

Possible clarifying prompts:

- What does that experience [or behavior or work, etc.] look like?
- As I think about the story you shared, I wonder if _____ describes what this experience was like for you? (For either Yes or No responses: Can you tell me more about that?)
- What did it mean for you to _____ [feel, act, think, or speak in a certain way, etc.]
- How do you make sense of that experience?

2. As a tenured faculty member in a BSW program, how do you understand your role related to working with under-prepared students?

Possible clarifying prompts:

- How do you know that _____ is your role?
- How would I know that was your role?
- What does that role look like on a day-to-day basis?
- Can you describe an experience that demonstrates you acting in that role?

- (If a participant describes experiences with colleagues, administrators, policies, etc.) What was it like for you to have that experience with _____? What do you make of that interaction?
3. If you were to speak with a new faculty member who is just starting to teach, how would you describe the experience of working with under-prepared students?
- Possible clarifying prompts:*
- What do believe is important for new social work educators to know about working with under-prepared students?
4. Will you tell me a story [or another story] that represents what it means to you to be a social work educator?
- Possible clarifying prompts:*
- What does it look like?
 - How would I know a social work educator when I see her?
 - Can you give a “for instance” that would show me what you mean by...?
 - How do you make sense of that experience?
5. Can you think of a time that would show me your thinking when you _____ [decided to..., changed your mind about..., behaved a certain way, etc.]?
- Possible clarifying prompts:*
- Can you say more about that?
 - What is important to you about that time?

Appendix C

Confidentiality Agreement for Transcription Services

I, _____, transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all digital audio recordings and documentation received from Robert F. Richardson II related to his doctoral study on exploring BSW educators' experiences of working with underprepared students.

Furthermore, I agree to:

1. Hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of digitally recorded interviews, or in any associated documents;
2. Store all study-related digital recordings and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession;
3. Upload all transcripts of the digital recordings in a timely manner to Robert Richardson's password protected account on the Connecticut Secretary's secure server;
4. Delete all electronic files containing study-related digital audio recordings, transcribed interview texts, and any other study-related documents from my computer hard drive after the completion of transcription.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the digital audio recordings and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcriber's name (printed) _____

Transcriber's signature _____

Date _____

Appendix D

INDIANA UNIVERSITY STUDY INFORMATION SHEET FOR

Exploring BSW Educators' Experiences of Working with Underprepared Students

You are invited to participate in a research study of the experience of social work educators who work with underprepared Baccalaureate Social Work (BSW) students. You were selected as a possible subject because you are a social work educator who might work with underprepared students and might meet the participation criteria. Study participants will a) be tenured faculty members at programs accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), b) teach undergraduate courses, and c) self-identify as instructors working with underprepared students. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

The study is being conducted by Dr. Kathy Lay (principal investigator) and Rob Richardson (co-investigator) from the Indiana University School of Social Work in Indianapolis, Indiana. This study is undertaken, in part, as Rob Richardson's dissertation to complete his PhD in Social Work at Indiana University.

STUDY PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of tenured social work educators working with underprepared students in baccalaureate social work (BSW) programs. Little is known about the perspectives of social work educators who work with underprepared students on a daily basis, and this research seeks to begin to fill that gap.

PROCEDURES FOR THE STUDY:

If you agree to be in the study, you will do the following things:

The study consists of one digitally recorded interview conducted in-person, using the telephone, or using web-based audio-visual software, and lasting about 30-90 minutes. One follow-up interview, if needed and agreed to, will be 15-20 minutes and be used to clarify specific concepts discussed in the initial interviews.

Possible questions that you will be asked include: 1. I'd like you to tell me a story about working with an underprepared student that you feel best captures that experience for you, 2. Will you tell me a story that represents what it means to you to be a social work educator, 3. As a tenured faculty member in a BSW program, how do you understand your role related to working with underprepared students, or 4. If you were to speak with a new faculty member who is just starting to teach, how would you describe the experience of working with underprepared students?

CONFIDENTIALITY

Efforts will be made to keep your personal information confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Your identity will be held in confidence in reports in which the study may be published. Each interview will be digitally audio-recorded, and the recordings will be transcribed by a qualified transcriptionist at Connecticut Secretary. The transcriptionist will sign a confidentiality agreement before accessing and transcribing any audio files. After each interview, the digital recording will be uploaded to a password protected account in the investigator's name at a secure

website maintained by Connecticut Secretary. The transcriptionist will access the files from this secure account, transcribe each interview, and then upload the transcription back into the investigator's password protected account on the same secure website. After the investigators access all transcriptions from this account, the transcriptionist will delete all digital audio recordings from the transcriptionist's hard drive. Names will not be asked while digitally recording the interview. The investigators will remove all identifying information for each participant from the transcripts and replace this information with pseudonyms. Digital recordings will be kept on a password protected flash drive. At the conclusion of the research project, digital audio recordings will be destroyed. De-identified electronic transcripts will be archived on a password protected flash drive.

Organizations that may inspect and/or copy your research records for quality assurance and data analysis include groups such as the study investigator and his/her research associates, the Indiana University Institutional Review Board or its designees, and (as allowed by law) state or federal agencies, specifically the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), who may need to access your research records.

PAYMENT

You will not receive payment for taking part in this study.

CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

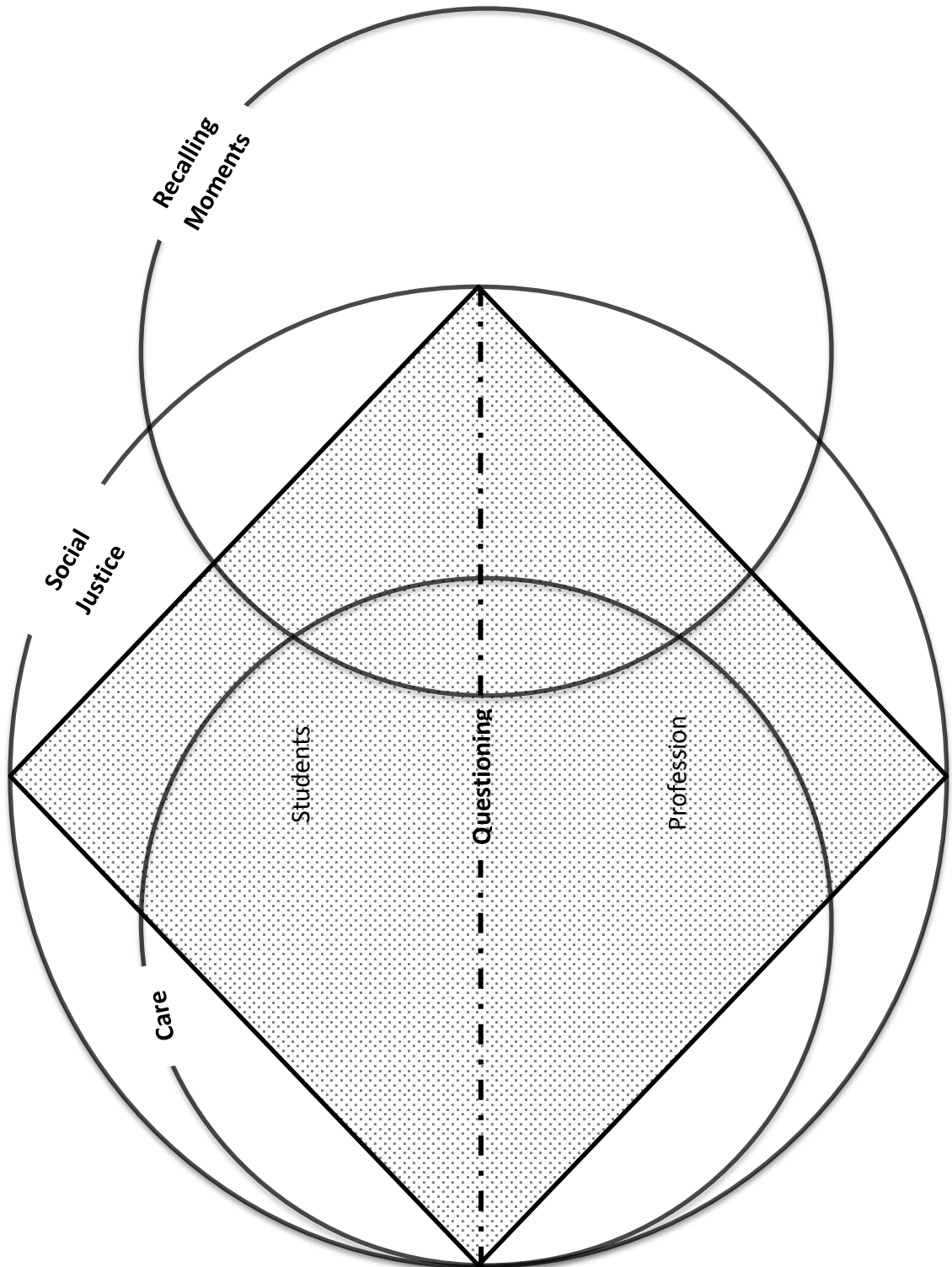
For questions about the study, contact the co-investigator, Rob Richardson, at 317-730-1373.

For questions about your rights as a research participant or to discuss problems, complaints or concerns about a research study, or to obtain information, or offer input, contact the IU Human Subjects Office at (317) 278-3458 or (800) 696-2949.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF STUDY

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or may leave the study at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relations with Indiana University School of Social Work.

Visual Representation of Thematic Structure



Appendix F

Evolving Analysis Codes and Thematic Structures

Thematic Structure 1

| Theme codes | Subtheme codes |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| Professional Commitment | |
| Social Justice Commitment | |
| | Contextual View |
| | Care |
| | Remessaging |
| Identity | |
| Role | |
| Negotiating Competing Commitments | |
| Empathy | |
| Validating Experiences | |
| Other | |

Thematic Structure 2

| Theme codes | Subtheme codes |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Professional Commitment | |
| Social Justice Commitment | |
| | Contextual View |
| | Care |
| | Remessaging |
| Interpreting Role from Co-commitments | |
| Navigating Competing Commitments | |
| | Tolerating Ambiguity |
| | Building Structures |
| | Recognizing External Pressures |
| | Reciprocity |
| Sustaining Moments | |
| | Empathy |
| | Validating Experiences |

Thematic Structure 3

| Theme codes | Subtheme codes |
|--|--|
| Fulfilling professional commitments | |
| Contextualizing students – education as social justice | |
| Constructing role from co-commitments | |
| Navigating commitments | Holding commitments in tension Building structure to help navigate ambiguity Reciprocation External pressures |
| Demonstrating care in and out of the classroom | |
| Sustaining moments | Remessaging Empathy Validating experiences |

Thematic Structure 4

| Theme codes | Subtheme codes |
|--|---|
| Understanding under-preparation as social injustice | |
| Questioning what it means to be a social work educator | |
| | Role dimension Responsibility dimension Collegial dimension |
| Recalling compelling moments | Empathetic moments Validating moments |
| Demonstrating care in and out of the classroom | |
| | Personal relationships Time outside of the classroom Negotiating individual circumstances |

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Zosky, D. L., Unger, J., White, K., & Mills, S. J. (2003). Non-Traditional and traditional social work students: Perceptions of field instructors. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 23(3/4), 185-201.

Curriculum Vitae

Richardson II, Robert. F.

EDUCATION:

UNDERGRADUATE: B.A. (Social Work), Taylor University, 1994
GRADUATE: M.S.W. (Macro Practice), Indiana University School of Social Work, 1999
Ph.D. (Social Work), Indiana University, 2015

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS:

August 2011 – December 2011

Visiting Lecturer, Indiana University School of Social Work, Indianapolis, IN.
Duties: create interactive and experiential learning environments for graduate and undergraduate students preparing for social work practice. Develop students' professional knowledge, values, and skills by using adult learning principles, accommodating diverse learning styles, and incorporating technology-based methods. Courses taught include introduction to social work, academic writing, executive leadership practice, and integration of theory and practice.

August 2009 – May 2010

Teaching Assistant, Indiana University School of Social Work, Indianapolis, IN.
Duties: research promising practices with students transferring from a two-year community college into the baccalaureate social work program; offer academic mentoring including writing skills, study habits, and navigating educational supports.

August 2007 – August 2009

Research Assistant, Indiana University School of Social Work, Indianapolis, IN. State of Indiana Department of Child Services Family Case Manager Training Evaluation
Duties: data analysis and report writing.

August 1999 – May 2005

Adjunct Faculty/Field Supervisor, Indiana University School of Social Work, Indianapolis, IN. Duties: teach and supervise BSW and MSW student interns.

February 2000 – May 2004

Adjunct Faculty/Field Supervisor, Taylor University Social Work Department, Indianapolis, IN. Duties: teach and supervise BSW student interns.

February 2000 – May 2002

Adjunct Faculty/Field Supervisor, Ball State University Social Work Department, Indianapolis, IN. Duties: teach and supervise BSW student interns.

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:

National Network for Social Work Managers
Council on Social Work Education
Indiana Association for Social Work Education

HONORS:

Indiana University School of Social Work, Certificate of Recognition for Excellence in Teaching, April 2011
Indiana University School of Social Work, PhD Program, Esprit – Spirit of Inquiry Award, April 2009.
Indianapolis Private Industry Council, Hope Award, August 2007.

TEACHING ASSIGNMENTS:**GUEST LECTURES**

SWK 320: Unleashing the Oppressed, Taylor University, Upland, IN. (August 1999 – present). Topic: “Sexual orientation and Christian faith.”

S433: Community Behavior and Practice, Indiana University School of Social Work. (August 2000). Topic: “Problem solving with communities.”

S433: Community Behavior and Practice, Indiana University School of Social Work. (September 2000). Topic: “Social Work values and ethics.”

S433: Community Behavior and Practice, Indiana University School of Social Work. (October 2000). Topic: “Technology in social services.”

SWK 300: Social Work Practice 2 (Organizations), Ball State University, Muncie, IN. (December 2008). Topic: “Processing your experience.”

SERVICE:**INDIANA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK:**

PhD Program Committee, Student Representative, August 2008 – August 2009.

TAYLOR UNIVERSITY:

Social Work Department Community Advisory Board, August 1999 – August 2013.

COMMUNITY:

Mental Health and Employment Network of Care, Homeless Employment subcommittee chair, September 2006 – September 2007.
Corporation for Supportive Housing Peer-to-Peer Exchange, Indianapolis Site Visit, Facilitator, March 2006.
City of Indianapolis, Indy Homeless Connect, Employment Program chair, 2006 – 2008.
Homeless Employment Policy Think Tank, Oakland, CA; Member, January 2006.
Board Member, Literacy PLUS, Board member, January 2004 – December 2005.
Board Member, Indiana Rehabilitation Association, Board Member, July 2003 – June 2005.
Taylor University, Social Work Department, Community Advisor Board; Member, September 1999 – present.
Deaf Community Services, Volunteer, June 1996 – December 1996.
The Damien Center, Buddy Program, Volunteer, August 1994 – September 1997.

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES:

PRESENTATIONS:

Richardson, R. F., Wiehn, M., & Brown, C. (2006, February). Uniting employment and housing. Paper presented at the South Hampton Roads Regional Conference on Ending Homelessness. Virginia Beach.

Richardson, R. F., & Schnaith, B. (2006, April). Uniting employment and housing. Paper presented at the APSE Mental Health and Employment Conference, New York.

Richardson, R. F. (2006, April). Reporting and documenting outcomes. Paper presented at the Ending Chronic Homelessness through Employment and Housing Grantee Summit, Boston.

Richardson, R. F. (2006, June). Integrating employment programs into supportive housing. Paper presented at the Supportive Housing Network of New York Annual Conference. New York, NY.

Khalsa, R., McCrory, P., Richardson, R. F., & Wall, A. T. (2006, November). Strengthening new partnerships and (re)investments. Paper presented at the Supportive Housing Leadership Forum III, Arlington.

Richardson, R. F., & Long, J. (2006, December). Uniting employment and housing. Paper presented at the INAPSE Annual Conference, Indianapolis.

Richardson, R. F., & Stark, S. (2007, October). Working to end homelessness. Paper presented at the Clarian Health Community Plunge, Indianapolis.

Rio, J., Richardson, R. F., & Rogers, D. (2008, February). Reducing chronic homelessness. Paper presented at the National Association of Workforce Boards Annual Conference, Washington, DC.

Richardson, R. F., & Orr, C. (2008, December). Orchestrating job retention for individuals who experience homelessness. Paper presented at the INAPSE Annual Conference, Indianapolis.

PRACTICE EXPERIENCE:

May 1997 – July 1998

Housing Services Coordinator, The Damien Center, Indianapolis, IN. Coordinated grant monies, application and eligibility procedures, and committee work for tenant based housing, project based housing and the Direct Emergency Financial Assistance (DEFA) program. Interpreted regulatory guidelines and responded to client, care coordinator and landlord concerns regarding client housing.

August 1998 – May 1999

Community Developer, Indianapolis Neighborhood Resource Center, Indianapolis, IN. Designed and facilitated customized training for neighborhood based organizations including board development, strategic planning, creating by-laws and running effective meetings. Developed a comprehensive strategy for assessing educational needs and participated in various planning efforts.

May 1999 – July 2002

Human Development Director, Community Alliance of the Far Eastside, Inc. (CAFE), Indianapolis, IN. Directed interdisciplinary team of professionals offering an array of services to build knowledge, skills, and resources with neighborhood residents. Using a team strategy, developed, implemented and evaluated client-centered programming. Expanded organizational capacity by diversifying funding, building a network of community partners and eliciting community involvement.

July 2002 – December 2004

Director of Social Services, Partners In Housing Development Corporation, Indianapolis, IN. Fostered and implemented permanent supportive housing through creative systems, partnerships and staff direction. Facilitated the collaboration of multiple stakeholders to reach common goals. Monitored outcomes of and compliance with numerous contracts. Expanded in-kind and financial support via grants and individual donors. Insured consumer participation.

December 2004 – August 2007

Senior Project Manager, Indianapolis Private Industry Council, Inc., Indianapolis, IN. Lead one of five national demonstration projects integrating promising practices to move chronically homeless adults with multiple disabilities toward housing stability and competitive employment. Managed operations and systemic change efforts including staff supervision, policy development, training coordination, stakeholder convening, and data collection and interpretation.

PROJECT HONORS:

U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration,
Recognition of Excellence Award, Honorable Mention for “Recognizing Special Populations in the Workforce.” Presented to the Threshold Project at the Workforce Innovations Conference, Anaheim, CA, July 2006.

Coalition for Homelessness Intervention and Prevention, Blueprint to End Homelessness Champion Award: Employment. Presented to the Threshold Project at the Annual Celebration, Indianapolis, IN, October 2007.

September 2007 – September 2008

Independent Consultant, Indianapolis Private Industry Council, Inc., Indianapolis, IN. Provided technical assistance related to project management. Served as intermediary between IPIC and project specific stakeholders including the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, the Mental Health and Employment Network of Care, and the Chronic Homeless and Employment Technical Assistance team.

PUBLICATIONS:

ARTICLES (Peer reviewed):

Richardson, R. F. (2010). 360-degree feedback: Integrating business know-how with social work values. *Administration in Social Work*, 34(3), 259-274.

REPORTS:

Hostetter, C., Decker, V., & Richardson, R. (2007, November). Child Welfare Education and Training Partnership training evaluation quarterly report: Third quarter 2007. Indianapolis: Indiana University School of Social Work.

Hostetter, C., Decker, V., & Richardson, R. (2008, February). Child Welfare Education and Training Partnership training evaluation quarterly report: Fourth quarter 2007. Indianapolis: Indiana University School of Social Work.

- Hostetter, C., Decker, V., & Richardson, R. (2008, February). Child Welfare Education and Training Partnership training evaluation yearend report 2007. Indianapolis: Indiana University School of Social Work.
- Hostetter, C., Decker, V., & Richardson, R. (2008, April). Child Welfare Education and Training Partnership training evaluation quarterly report: First quarter 2008. Indianapolis: Indiana University School of Social Work.
- Hostetter, C., Decker, V., Richardson, R., Butler, K., & Harmon, C. (2008, July). Child Welfare Education and Training Partnership training evaluation quarterly report: Second quarter 2008. Indianapolis: Indiana University School of Social Work.
- Hostetter, C., Decker, V., Richardson, R., Butler, K., & Harmon, C. (2008, October). Child Welfare Education and Training Partnership training evaluation quarterly report: Third quarter 2008. Indianapolis: Indiana University School of Social Work.
- Hostetter, C., Decker, V., Richardson, R., Butler, K., & Harmon, C. (2008, February). Child Welfare Education and Training Partnership training evaluation quarterly report: Fourth quarter 2008. Indianapolis: Indiana University School of Social Work.
- Hostetter, C., Decker, V., Richardson, R., Butler, K., & Harmon, C. (2008, February). Child Welfare Education and Training Partnership training evaluation yearend report 2008. Indianapolis: Indiana University School of Social Work.